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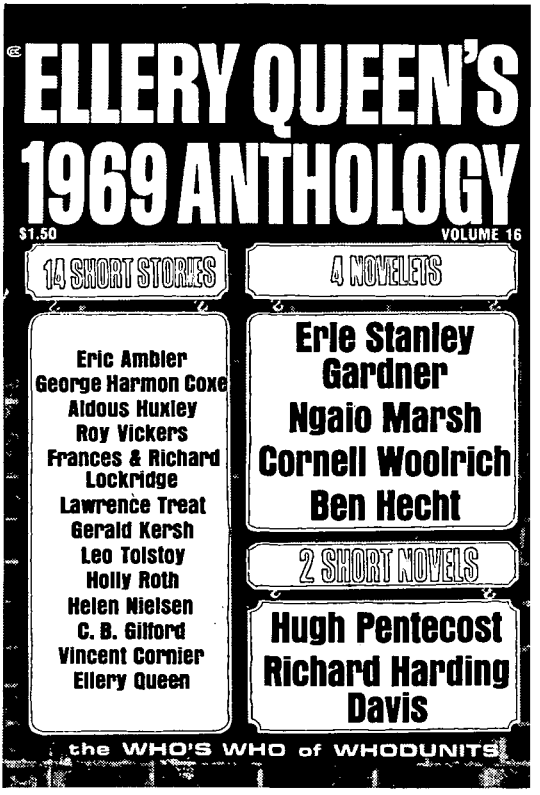

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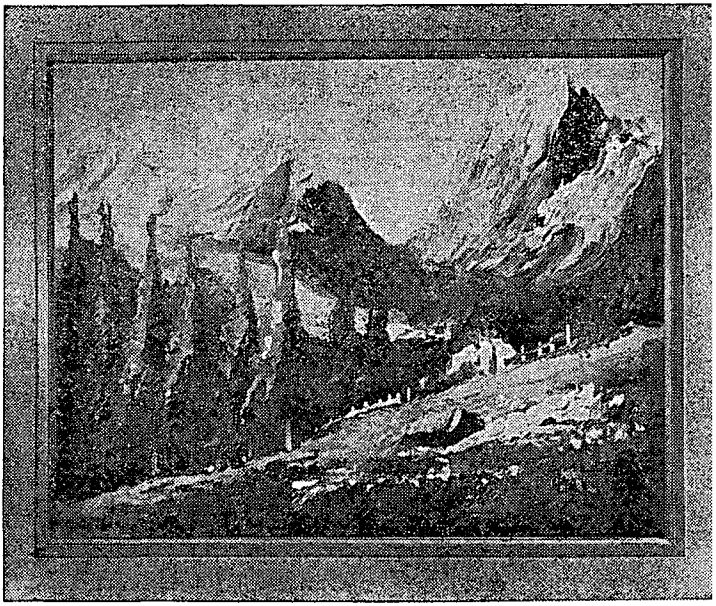

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THE APPEARANCE OF TRUTH — George Harmon Coxe — 18

7 NEW SHORT STORIES: Detection, Crime, and Gothica

PIERRE CHAMBRUN AND THE BLACK DAYS — Hugh Pentecost — 6

A CHILD'S GARDEN OF PROFITS — John Pierce — 57

SUCH A LONG TIME AFTER — Rhona Petrie — 67

MR. STRANG TAKES A FIELD TRIP — William Brittain — 79

SOMETHING EVIL IN THE HOUSE — Celia Fremlin — 89

THE COMPANION — Agatha Christie — 116

MA TANTE ALWAYS DONE HER BEST — Berkely Mather — 139

T AS IN THREAT — Lawrence Treat — 150

EQMM "FIRST STORIES"

START FROM SCRATCH — Jerome L. Johnson — 99

E. Q. GRIFFEN EARNS HIS NAME — Josh Pachter — 106

SPECIAL FEATURES

QUEEN'S QUORUM: Supplement Number Two — Ellery Queen — 130

VERSE: More "O" Bits — Richard M. Gordon — 149

HARDCOVERS AND PAPERBACKS OF THE MONTH — 105

INDEX TO VOLUME FIFTY-TWO — 162-160

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a *NEW* detective story by
HUGH PENTECOST

the first Pierre Chambrun short story

Pierre Chambrun, the resident manager of New York's luxury Hotel Beaumont, has appeared in five full-length novels—THE CANNIBAL WHO OVERATE *(1962)*, THE SHAPE OF FEAR *(1964)*, THE EVIL THAT MEN DO *(1966)*, THE GOLDEN TRAP *(1967)*, *and* THE GILDED NIGHTMARE *(1968)*; *and in one short novel,* MURDER DE LUXE *(EQMM, issue of October 1963).*

Now Hugh Pentecost has written the first short story about his hotel-manager detective—"Pierre Chambrun and the Black Days." As an introduction to this "first," let us give you some excerpts from Pierre Chambrun's dossier:

A native Frenchman, he came to the United States at an early age, went to school and college in this country, working his way through by summer and winter jobs in hotels—busboy, bellboy, waiter, bartender—or, as we say over here, starting at the bottom. He speaks seven languages fluently—perhaps even more than seven—and while he can assume a Continental manner that would charm a Duchess or please a Queen, he can think like an American.

During World War II he returned to France to fight in the Resistance. At the end of the war, when France was free again, he came back to his adopted country and eventually became resident manager of the Hotel Beaumont. Like all top executives, he has the gift of delegating authority to a staff, seeming never to interfere, yet knowing at any moment what is going on in every nook and cranny of the Beaumont. He is not infallible; some of his decisions have proved to be wrong, but he is the kind of man who insists that, given the same circumstances, he would make the same decision a second time.

Pierre Chambrun has a dry, sometimes caustic, wit. However, he never forgets to compliment an employee for a job well done; but when a member of his staff is careless, the resident manager is capable of an anger so cold that it freezes and withers. While some employees might fear him, they are loyal without question or hesitation, and anyone, employee or guest, who hurts the Beaumont's reputation is guilty of an unforgivable crime . . .

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Mr. Pentecost is going to write a series of detective short stories about that formidable perfectionist, Pierre Chambrun—and, indeed, the second story, "Pierre Chambrun and the Sad Song," has already been finished; and when we publish that second story we will give you excerpts from the dossier of the hotel itself.

Now, see how the great man (as the members of his staff regard him) handles the mysterious disappearance of a chic, cool, attractive young woman . . .

PIERRE CHAMBRUN AND THE BLACK DAYS

by HUGH PENTECOST

PIERRE CHAMBRUN NEVER EATS lunch. As resident manager of the Hotel Beaumont, New York City's top luxury hotel, his busiest and most unpredictable hours are from 11:00 in the morning until 3:00 in the afternoon. He fortifies himself with a hearty breakfast at 9:00 sharp consisting of juice or fruit in season, lamb chops, or a steak, or brook trout, or sometimes a Dover sole, with stacks of gluten toast and sweet butter, topped off with a spot of English marmalade.

And coffee. Coffee, coffee, coffee. He starts with American coffee—precisely three cups—and then switches to Turkish which his incomparable secretary, Miss Ruysdale, makes and remakes for him on the carved sideboard in the corner of his elegantly furnished office.

I have a tendency to use clichés in describing the operation of the Hotel Beaumont. I have said in print that it runs like "a beautifully engineered Swiss watch." Even those of us on the staff who know all its secrets, who are, in fact, each a small cogwheel in the works, are often unaware of anything out of order. But to Pierre Chambrun the slightest deviation from the norm sounds to him like a broken piston in Jack Benny's Maxwell.

My job is public relations director for the Beaumont. The first item on my day's routine is to go to Chambrun's office on the second floor at precisely 9:22 to discuss the problems of the day. Miss Ruysdale will have preceded me at precisely 8:45. At precisely 9:00 Monsieur Fresney, the head chef, will have brought the breakfast.

Fresney prepares the breakfast menu so that the day begins for Chambrun with, hopefully, a pleas-

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ant surprise. At precisely 9:22 Chambrun will pour his second cup of American coffee and light his first Egyptian cigarette of the day. As I walk into his office he will glance my way, his eyes twinkling in their deep pouches, and offer me some wry comment on the day's problems that starts things off on a cheerful level.

On this particular morning there was no witticism, no "Good morning." The great man sat behind his carved Florentine desk, drumming his fingers. His eyes had that baleful look of a hanging judge which appeared only when things had gone very wrong.

I glanced at his tray. The breakfast steak was only half eaten. God help Monsieur Fresney if the beef had not been absolutely perfect. Chambrun was, I saw by the ashtray, on his third cigarette. I glanced at my watch, wondering if in some fashion I had mistimed my arrival. No, it was now 9:22½.

"Something wrong?" I asked him.

"You have an amazing capacity, Mark, for overlooking the obvious," he said. "For the first time in ten years Ruysdale is late!"

If there is an indispensable member of Chambrun's staff it is Miss Betsy Ruysdale. She's hard to describe. Chambrun has many requirements in a personal secretary. She must be efficient beyond all conceivable specifications. She must never dream of an eight-hour day or any regular working hours. She must be chic, but not disturbing. Chambrun doesn't want the male members of his staff mooning over some doll in his outer office. She must eternally anticipate his needs without waiting for orders.

By some miracle Miss Ruysdale manages to meet all these requirements. Her clothes are quiet, but smart and expensive. Her manner toward the staff is friendly, touched by a subdued humor, but she draws an invisible line over which no one dares to step. She is clearly all woman, but if she belongs to some man his identity is a secret that no one has penetrated. We tell ourselves it can't be Chambrun. Or can it? He neuters her by calling her "Ruysdale"—never Miss Ruysdale or Betsy. Her devotion to him is unquestionably total, but questionably romantic.

Her absence, even her tardiness, on this or any other morning is unthinkable. Only a disaster would account for her absence.

"Would you like me to call her apartment?" I asked.

"That was naturally the first thing I did," Chambrun said. "No answer."

Miss Ruysdale's apartment is only four blocks from the hotel. Neither a subway tieup or a traffic jam could account for her failure to appear on time.

"Are you sure she didn't mention being late this morning when she went home last night?" I asked.

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"My dear idiot!" Chambrun said. He reached for an appointment pad on his desk. "I'd like you to stand by, Mark, in case Ruysdale doesn't appear very soon. At approximately eleven o'clock a special French delegation to the United Nations is due to arrive from Kennedy Airport. Paul Lourier has asked me to greet them personally. I know some of them from the black days. If Ruysdale has not arrived you will take my place and apologize for my absence."

"Of course."

"You will explain that Lourier also cannot be on hand because of an emergency meeting of the Security Council."

"Ruysdale will show up," I reassured him.

He stared at the empty coffee cup in front of him. This was the point at which Ruysdale usually handed him the first cup of Turkish coffee. The coffeemaker was not in evidence on the sideboard. I couldn't help out with that.

Chambrun had referred to "the black days." I knew what he meant. He'd been born in France but had come to this country at a very early age. During World War II he'd returned to his homeland to fight in the French Resistance. It had been a grim time in which many of his friends had died at the hands of the Nazis. Among those who had been close to him in those days was Paul Lourier, now on the staff of the French ambassador to the U.N.

Lourier had an apartment on the twentieth floor of the Beaumont and he and Chambrun spent what little social time they ever had in each other's company. Lourier was a relaxed, charming, cultivated gentleman with prematurely white hair and expressive black eyebrows. He and Chambrun had a deep fondness for each other. There were evidently others coming in this special delegation at 11:00 who had been close to Chambrun and Lourier in "the black days." They would be entitled to special courtesies.

"She would phone if she could," Chambrun said, bringing me back to the present. "I've called the local police precinct. No one has been taken ill on the street—no accident between here and Ruysdale's apartment. Jerry Dodd is going over the hotel from basement to penthouses."

Jerry Dodd is what we call the "house officer" at the Beaumont, head of our security setup. The Beaumont has its problems like any other hotel—the deadbeats, the drunks, the expensive call girls, the cantankerous complainers, the professional hotel thieves who never get caught and the amateurs who always get caught, the suicides, the heart attacks suffered by elderly gentlemen in the rooms of young ladies who are not their wives. And on at least three times so far in my time as P.R. director—murder. The hotel is like a small city, and what happens in a small city happens in the Beaumont.

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"She's *got* to be all right!" Chambrun said.

I was startled. I'd never heard him sound helpless before.

Jerry Dodd discovered certain aspects of Miss Ruysdale's daily routine that none of us had been aware of before. Her efficiency was such that the machinery hadn't been visible to any of us. It seems that each morning at 8:30 she entered the Beaumont through the basement entrance to the kitchen where she paused to cast a critical eye on Monsieur Fresney's breakfast preparations for the great man. Then she proceeded by the service elevator to the lobby and the reception desk. There Mr. Atterbury, chief desk clerk on the day shift, handed her a list of the new registrations and the checkouts which had taken place since his departure the previous afternoon, plus any special mail addressed to Chambrun. These items were carried to the second floor and her desk in the outer office. She then picked up the phone and called Mrs. Veach, chief telephone operator, reported that she was "in business," and asked for any messages left for the great man—or by him.

On this particular morning not a single one of these routines had been followed.

Jerry Dodd had issued a general alarm to the hotel staff—doormen, bell captains, housekeepers, restaurant captains, elevator operators, porters, shopkeepers in the lobby arcade. No one had seen her.

At 10:20 my desk phone rang. It was Chambrun.

"I'm leaving the hotel for a while," he said. It was without precedent. "You will have to greet the French delegation."

"Count on me."

"If there is any news of any kind call me at Ruysdale's apartment." He hesitated. "There is a spare key in her desk. Something there may give me a clue."

I didn't stop to wonder at the time whether the spare key was really in Miss Ruysdale's desk or on the great man's keyring. I was beginning to catch something of his almost feverish anxiety.

I was at the reception desk when the French delegation—five gentlemen with a multitude of travel stickers on their luggage—arrived at a few minutes past 11:00.

"I am Mark Haskell," I said, introducing myself to the spokesman for the group, a Monsieur Jardine. "Unfortunately neither Monsieur Lourier nor Mr. Chambrun could be here to greet you. An emergency meeting of the Security Council has engaged Monsieur Lourier, and Mr. Chambrun is confronted with a crisis here in the hotel. I am at your service, gentlemen, till one or both of them is free."

They were all smiles, undisturbed. Jardine inquired warmly of Chambrun. "It is years since I have seen him."

The delegation had been provid-

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ed with a suite and four adjoining single rooms on the ninth floor. I went with them to make certain everything was in apple-pie order. There was much jabbering in French with which I'm familiar but not fluent. I had Room Service send them a waiter who spoke their language, and then I departed with much bowing and scraping.

Back at the reservation desk I got a copy of their names from Atterbury and took it up to Chambrun's office. He would want to know who the members of the party were. There were probably other old friends in addition to Jardine.

I felt something ominous in the emptiness of the two offices—Ruysdale's and Chambrun's. The receptionist who sat in a cubbyhole just outside Miss Ruysdale's office—a girl named Sally—just shook her head when I came in. She looked pale and a little shaky. Evidently there was no news.

I went through to Chambrun's desk and put the list of names on his blotter. I wondered where Ruysdale kept the Turkish coffeemaker and the necessary supplies. I thought it might cheer the boss up if he found it ready for him when he came back. I was looking through the lower reaches of the sideboard when I heard someone come into the office behind me. I turned.

Miss Ruysdale stood just inside the door, looking very chic in a black linen suit, white gloves, white toque, white handbag. There was a fine high color in her cheeks and a curious, almost mystical smile on her lips. I had the crazy notion that she was under the influence of some drug.

"Do you know where Mr. Chambrun is?" she asked in her crisp, businesslike voice.

"I think he may be at your apartment," I said. "Where in God's name have you been?"

The mysterious smile widened slightly. "I have been on an extended hansom-cab ride in the park," she said.

I just stared at her.

"At gunpoint," she added.

Most men have had the experience of waiting for some precious female to keep a date—a wife, a girl friend, a prospective girl friend. She is late, late, late. You begin to fantasy all the terrible things that may have happened to her—mugged, assaulted, run over by a truck. And then she arrives, only mildly apologetic. She had stopped to window-shop, or have a cup of coffee with an old friend, or she had "just lost track of time." Your anxiety turns to blazing anger. How dare she turn up all in one piece, unharmed, undamaged?

Chambrun was in that kind of rage when he returned, having been summoned by Ruysdale's phone call announcing that she was at last in the office and "perfectly all right." He sat at his desk, his black eyes visible only through slits in their

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deep pouches. He ignored the Turkish coffee now at his elbow. His hand shook slightly as he held a lighter to his cigarette.

"The explanation had better be good," he said to Ruysdale, his voice dangerously cold.

"It isn't," she said. "It isn't even believable."

"I suggest you try it on for size," Chambrun said.

It sounded hallucinatory. She had arrived, Ruysdale told us, at the basement entrance to the Beaumont's kitchen at the usual time—8:30. She had been just about to start down the concrete steps to the door when she felt something round and hard pressed into the small of her back.

"Please don't move or cry out, Miss Ruysdale," a pleasant male voice said. "What you feel is a gun."

You read about this sort of thing happening nearly every day in Fun City, Ruysdale told us, but you know it will never happen to you. Here it *was* happening, and in broad daylight.

Ruysdale is strictly not the hysterical type. I've seen her under all kinds of pressure and I can vouch for that. I can imagine that her very competent cerebral wheels were turning competently and coolly.

"There is about seven dollars in my purse," she said without turning, standing quite still. "I'd appreciate it very much if you didn't take my driver's license and my credit cards."

"Dear Miss Ruysdale," the male voice said, a lilt of humor in it, "this is not a holdup. I'm going to put my hand on your shoulder and turn you very slowly. Then you will walk toward the vehicle at the curb."

The hand on her shoulder was gentle. She turned and the man with the gun stayed behind her.

"I'd actually seen the hansom cab at the curb when I walked up, but it hadn't registered," Ruysdale said. "There are a few of them still operating from the square in front of the Plaza. Round the park for ten dollars. The driver, wearing a dilapidated silk hat, sat on top, his face turned away. The horse was old, black, sleepy-looking."

"Into the hansom, please, Miss Ruysdale," the man with the gun said.

Ruysdale looked up and down the street but there was no one close enough to be helpful. You do what you're told, she thought, when there's a gun at your back. The driver opened the folding doors from his position on top. Ruysdale got in and the gunman followed and sat beside her. The doors folded in front of them, imprisoning them behind the horse. Ruysdale turned to look at her captor.

"Describe him," Chambrun said.

That vague smile moved Ruysdale's fine lips. "I can't," she said.

"Can't?" Chambrun's voice was impatient.

"He was wearing a rubber mask made to look exactly like Boris Kar-

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loff," Ruysdale said. "His hands were white, slim, delicate, well cared-for. He held the gun as if he knew how to use it. The horse started away toward the Park."

"What did he want?" Chambrun asked.

The vague smile broadened. "We drove round and round the Park for about three hours," Ruysdale said. "In that time I was subjected to the most charming verbal lovemaking I can ever remember."

"Lovemaking?" Chambrun sat forward.

"He had admired me for a long time, he said. He knew I was unapproachable in the normal fashion. He had chosen this rather melodramatic method to get me alone and tell me what was in his heart."

"Oh, come on!" Chambrun said.

"Is it so impossible that someone should find me unusually attractive?" Ruysdale asked, with just the slightest edge to her voice.

"You are unusually attractive," he said, as if he was referring to a new IBM computer. "But at gunpoint! I admit the rather unusual Freudian overtones, but—really!"

"He quoted poetry to me," Ruysdale said. Her pale eyelids lowered. "'—What am I? What is any man,
That he dare ask for you? Therefore my heart
Hides behind phrases. There's a modesty
In these things too—I come here to pluck down
Out of the sky the evening star—then smile,
And stoop to gather little flowers.'"

Chambrun made an impatient gesture with his cigarette. "That is part of Cyrano de Bergerac's endless speech to Roxane from under the balcony. Sentimental twaddle! And if I remember your dossier, Ruysdale, you played Roxane in a college production of the Rostand play. You remember the words from that and not because your clown in the hansom cab spoke them so passionately."

"They were nicely chosen," Ruysdale said.

"And provided me with three hours of gut-twisting anxiety," Chambrun said. His eyes narrowed. He was looking down at the names of the French delegation I'd left on his blotter. He brought his closed fist down on the desk. His eyes, bright and cold as two newly minted dimes, turned my way. "Get Jerry Dodd here on the double," he said.

I went to the phone on the corner of his desk. He'd turned back to Ruysdale. "How did he leave you?" I heard him ask.

"I was ordered out of the hansom in the middle of the Park and they clattered off. When I got out he said,
"'In my most sweet unreasonable dreams,
I have not dreamed of this! Now let me die,
Having lived . . .'"

"We should be looking for an

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out-of-work actor," Chambrun said. "Did you happen to notice the hack license in the hansom?"

"The little metal frame where it belonged was empty," Ruysdale said.

"Thank God you were able to pay attention to some aspect of reality, even though the result is negative." He lit a fresh cigarette. Ruysdale, a little slowly, I thought, took his demitasse cup to the sideboard and refilled it with Turkish coffee.

"I dislike destroying your romantic notions, Ruysdale," Chambrun said, after he'd sipped the steaming coffee, "but I'm afraid your adventure this morning was not aimed at you, but at me."

"At you?"

"I am not beautiful," Chambrun said drily, "but I can be dangerous. What did I *not* do because of your absence this morning?"

"You didn't finish your breakfast," I said.

"You didn't go through the morning mail," Ruysdale said.

"I didn't welcome the French delegation," Chambrun said. He looked at me. "Did you locate Jerry?"

"He's on his way," I said.

Four of the five names, including Monsieur Jardine's, on the French delegation were familiar to Chambrun. The fifth, one Alphonse Dufor, was the name of a stranger.

"I haven't quite got on the rails here yet," Jerry Dodd said. The Beaumont's house officer had arrived in Chambrun's office on the run.

Chambrun was staring thoughtfully at the list of French names. "Why should I be maneuvered away from the job of greeting the delegation," he asked, more of himself than of us. "I've known Jardine for nearly twenty-five years. Like my friend Paul Lourier, he was one of the leaders in the Resistance. Three others I know less well, but well enough. Why should anyone want to prevent my meeting these old friends?"

"The name Dufor means nothing to you?" Jerry asked.

"Nothing." Chambrun's eyes narrowed. "But his face? Perhaps I knew him as someone else."

"You'd be bound to see him sooner or later," Jerry said. "They're booked into the hotel for ten days."

Jerry is a thin wiry little man in his late forties, with a professional smile that does nothing to hide the fact that his pale restless eyes are able to see and read a great deal at a moment's glance. Chambrun trusts him implicitly.

Chambrun looked thoughtfully at Jerry. "Later might be too late." He pushed himself up out of his desk chair. "Just to be sure, let's pay a visit on Monsieur Alphonse Dufor. Where is he located?"

Jerry glanced at his notebook. "Jardine is in Suite 9A. The others have 901, 903, 905, and 907. Dufor is in 907."

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Chambrun, Jerry, and I headed for the ninth floor, leaving Miss Ruysdale to wonder about her Cyrano. There was no answer to our knocks on the door of Room 907. Chambrun gave a little sign to Jerry who promptly opened the door with one of his magic passkeys.

Dufor was not in his room. He had left it neatly settled—three suits and a dinner jacket on hangers in the closet. Shirts, ties, and underthings in the bureau. Shaving kit and a robe in the bathroom.

"Jardine," Chambrun said at my elbow.

We went down the hall to the door of the suite. This time our knock was answered promptly—by Jardine himself. At the sight of Chambrun he burst into a volley of French, seized Chambrun by the shoulders, kissed him on both cheeks, and literally dragged him into the suite. He was delighted to see me again. He was delighted to meet Jerry. He was delighted.

"I have a problem, Max," Chambrun said, "and no time to go into detail. Who is Alphonse Dufor?"

Something happened to Jardine's delight. There was suddenly pain in his eyes. "You have seen him?" he asked.

"I have not seen him."

"The past is forgotten and forgiven, Pierre," Jardine said.

"Who is he?" Chambrun said, his voice dangerously cold again.

"You knew him," Jardine said unhappily, "as Jacques Midal."

"Mother have mercy!" Chambrun said. "Where is he?"

"In his room, I presume."

"He is not in his room." He turned to me. "Call the French offices at the United Nations and get me Paul Lourier."

"I tell you, it's all over and forgotten," Jardine said.

I put in the call to the U.N., trying to listen to Chambrun at the same time.

"Jacques Midal was one of us in the black days," I heard him tell Jerry. "He was unmasked as a Nazi collaborator by my friend Lourier. He was subjected to torture by Lourier, and eventual imprisonment. If any man could have undying hatred for another man, Midal has it for Lourier."

"It is over and dead, Pierre," Jardine said, pleading. "All Midal wants is to live in peace and make reparation for his crimes by being a useful citizen of France."

I found myself connected with the French offices at the U.N. Lourier had left there half an hour ago, with word that he could be reached at the Beaumont. I reported.

"Check the front door and the lobby," Chambrun ordered. "He must be stopped from going to his apartment."

I got Johnny Thacker, the day bell captain. We were too late. Lourier had gone up to his apartment ten minutes ago.

We went to the twentieth floor, Jardine with us. It seemed fairly

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clear to me what had happened. Chambrun had been kept from seeing Dufor-Midal on his arrival. All Midal wanted was uninterrupted time to get at Paul Lourier.

"Why did he change his name?" I asked Jardine on the way up in the elevator.

Jardine shrugged wearily. "The name Midal was a household word for treachery at home," he said. "The man had paid for his crime. His remorse, his reformation, were genuine. He was given the legal right to change his name."

At the twentieth floor Chambrun literally ran to the door of Paul Lourier's apartment. He pounded on it with his fist. "Paul!" he shouted. "It is I, Pierre."

The door opened and the silver-haired Paul Lourier faced us. His face was the color of ashes.

"Thank God you've come, Pierre," he said. "I called your office and Miss Ruysdale told me you were somewhere in the hotel. She is trying to find you. I was happy to know that she was all right. Please come in."

We went in—but only just in.

Lying on the floor in a welter of blood was a man I recognized as one of the French delegation.

"Midal!" I heard Jardine whisper.

It was a grotesque business. A fencing foil had been driven through Midal's throat and literally pinned him to the floor. It must have severed his jugular. I glanced up at Lourier's mantel. Only one of the crossed foils I remembered as decorations was in place. Next to Midal's dead hand was a gun.

"He knocked on my door," Lourier said in a flat voice. "I had left it on the latch because I expected Room Service to bring me some champagne. I was on the point of inviting Max and his delegates for a small libation. I called out, 'Come in'—and there was Alphonse Dufor. He had that gun in his hand—and murder in his eyes. I knew he was not in a mood to listen to reason. I suppose he had cause to hate me so much."

"But you tried to reason?" Chambrun asked.

"No time," Lourier said. "I was standing there, by the mantel. He came charging across the room, cursing me. My reflex was automatic. I snatched down that foil from over the mantel and thrust. Miraculously I was quick enough."

Jerry Dodd moved forward and knelt by the gun. He used his handkerchief to pick it up. "French make," he said. He glanced at Lourier. "You were lucky. This is a hairtrigger gadget, but he'd forgotten to take off the safety catch."

"I think not," Chambrun said. He turned very slowly to look at Lourier, his friend. "I think it went like this, didn't it, Paul? You telephoned Dufor's room and asked him to join you. It was time to forgive and forget your mutual grievances. Because the grievances *were* mutual, weren't they, Paul? He had suffered at your

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hands, but the girl you loved had been brutalized and murdered by the Nazis, thanks to Midal's treachery."

"Pierre!"

"So he came to your room, eager to forgive your part in his horror and hoping for your forgiveness. Instead he got a few vengeful words from you—and a rapier in his throat. The gun is yours, isn't it, Paul? You put it beside him to lend authenticity to your story."

"Pierre, you must be out of your mind," Lourier said, in a shaken voice. "He arranged for the kidnaping of Miss Ruysdale so that you wouldn't see him when he arrived. He needed only a little time to reach me."

"It won't do, Paul," Chambrun said. "How could he have known—in France—about Ruysdale or what my reaction would be to her absence? But you knew, Paul. You knew my habits, my loyalties. You knew this morning that I was safely removed from the scene. It was *you* who needed only a little time."

Lourier leaned against the wall.

"As I remember, Paul," Chambrun said, "you were an actor before the war. May I ask, did you ever play the role of Cyrano de Bergerac?"

"Oh, God!" Lourier whispered.

NEXT MONTH . . .

Extra-Special Issue

All-Star
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***new* stories by**

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a Dr. Paul Standish *SHORT NOVEL* by

GEORGE HARMON COXE

A short novel, complete in this issue, about Dr. Paul Standish, medical doctor and city medical examiner . . . It looked like a simple case—the murder of a hoodlum, a muscle man, a thoroughly unsavory character "up twice for assault and once for manslaughter." But Dr. Standish had a large bump of curiosity. He found a piece of evidence that seemed out of kilter with the obviousness of the case, and he remembered what his mentor had always said: "The truth always rings true, but the appearance of truth varies widely."

String along with Doc Standish . . . a solid short novel from one of the solid "old pros" in the field . . .

THE APPEARANCE OF TRUTH

by GEORGE HARMON COXE

UNTIL 9:50 IN THE EVENING OF this Monday in late September, Paul Standish had devoted his time, as a young doctor should, to the demands of a modest but growing private practice. Not until he had put his car away, and was approaching the entrance of his apartment house, was it necessary for him to contend with the additional duties of his official job as County Medical Examiner.

The deduction was a simple one, once he spotted the police sedan at the curb and recognized the driver. It had happened before, and he knew that the dispatcher at Headquarters had been trying to reach him, and failing in this, had sent the car to wait for him. He stepped into the car resignedly. There was no telling now at what hour he'd get to bed.

"What is it this time?" he asked.

"A shooting." The driver stepped on the starter. "Homicide, I guess."

They drove rapidly cross-town then, coming presently to this block on the outer fringe of the downtown section, a neighborhood of small discouraged-looking shops which had corrupted the residential character of the stone houses originally constructed there. Two police cars stood opposite a narrow entrance adjacent to a radio repair

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shop. Beyond this, the ambulance from the morgue had backed diagonally into the curb, and Standish spoke briefly to the driver.

A uniformed policeman stood in the doorway, another waited in the third-floor hall, where a door stood open. The living room beyond was hot, stuffy, and crowded, but of those present only the police photographer paid any attention to the still figure in the easy chair.

Lieutenant Ballard, of Homicide, was talking to the precinct captain and two plain-clothes men. They glanced up at Standish's entrance, greeting him perfunctorily. The photographer nodded and stepped aside; then Standish got a look at the man in the chair: a tall, powerfully built man who might have been considered good-looking in a superficial, hard-jawed way; a fellow of thirty or so, clad in slacks, slippers, and a T-shirt stained darkly across the front.

After he had put down his bag Paul Standish stood a moment examining the dead man's face and finding it familiar, though the name escaped him. Then, while one part of his mind considered other things, he went about his job, lifting the lids to examine the eyes, gently testing for rigor as he manipulated the muscles of the jaw, neck, knee.

When he finished he stepped back to take a notebook from his bag and jot down his findings. He was still at it when Lieutenant Ballard moved up beside him.

Standish glanced up. "What's his name?"

"George Fleming. A hoodlum, a muscle man. Worked Florida winters as an odd-job bouncer, and lately he's been hustling for that gyp second-hand car lot at Grove and Fourth. Up twice for assault and once for manslaughter."

"Also," Standish added quietly, "he was up for something else."

"Oh?"

"Three months ago. A traffic death. Fleming ran down a man by the name of Tremaine one Saturday night."

Ballard frowned, then nodded slowly. "Sure," he said. "I sort of remember. Tremaine was a broker."

"And my testimony got Fleming off with the suspension of his driver's license," Standish said. "Because Tremaine was dead-drunk and the post-mortem proved it."

"Yeah." Ballard nodded again. "Well, it doesn't matter. When I walked in here I figured someone had ordered him rubbed out. Instead of that, he got killed over a dame named Sylvia Keith. Works as a hat-check girl at the Club Neilan."

He rocked on heel and toe, a solid-looking man in his late thirties with sandy hair and steady gray eyes that were wise and experienced. Mature eyes.

"This is the kind of case I understand," he said, "and sometimes things break for us. The way it stacks up," he said, still sounding pleased, "is that the Keith woman

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had been seeing a youngster named Estey, and Fleming didn't like it. He and Estey had a knockdown, drag-out fight the night before last, with Estey taking the beating. The kid got a gun—we've found a bartender who saw it—and tonight he used it. If it hadn't been for the fact that this is the night the Club Neilan is closed we'd have had the girl by now."

He turned away as a plain-clothes man addressed him, and Standish went back to his notebook. On a fresh sheet he sketched a plan of the room, noting the doors, windows, the position of the body. He had no idea that it would ever be used; it was simply part of a routine which had been taught him by Old Doc Lathrop, who had given him a job as an assistant in the days when he needed such fees, and had groomed the younger man to take his place as medical examiner before he retired. Now, having finished his sketch and noting that the police photographer was through he went to the hall door and summoned the ambulance men.

Even with the body removed the room seemed crowded. The air was blue with tobacco smoke, and traffic was heavy as detectives milled about and waited their turn for consultations with Ballard and the precinct captain. Wanting to wash his hands before he left and not sure just where the bath was, Standish backed into an alcove which served as a kitchenette.

Here there were a small icebox, a two-plate burner, and kitchen cabinets along one wall over the sink. A damp dish towel hung from a rack, but a roll of paper towels had been fastened in a recess, and Standish tore off two of these to dry his hands. The resulting wad of paper he threw at a metal wastebasket under the sink, missed, then stooped to retrieve it.

A lifetime habit of personal neatness had prompted him to make the effort, and it was this same characteristic neatness that took him one step more. For, having picked up the towels, he noticed a smaller, folded piece of paper—apparently thrown there by someone not quite so neat—which he reached for instinctively.

Only when he had it in his hand and noticed its whiteness and odd folds did he check his movement and take a second look, and in this he was moved, not by any suspicion, but by a vague curiosity that had as its basis no more than a familiarity with other folded bits of paper of similar size and smoothness.

That is how he happened to hunker back and open up the folds, to notice the residue of some colorless, crystalline substance which gave off a faint odor, not characteristic but aromatic. When he isolated a grain and touched it to his tongue the taste was bitter.

He rose then, a tallish man not much past thirty, lean to the point of thinness, his gaze somber and sightless as it fixed on the wall above

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the sink. He had no ears for the buzz of conversation or the restless movement in the adjoining room; it was several seconds before he glanced again at the paper in his hand and began to refold it with practiced fingers. When he had tucked it into his pocket he glanced again round the kitchenette, then walked back to pick up his bag.

Lieutenant Ballard intercepted him on the way to the door. "This time," he said, his grin self-satisfied, "I won't have to go up against Mary Hayward and get told off. Remind her, will you?"

Mary Hayward was Dr. Standish's nurse, secretary, and Girl Friday. She was jealous of the doctor's time and quite possibly of his affections. She resented particularly the demands that Ballard sometimes made when he was up against a difficult case and needed help, and she didn't hesitate to give voice to her feelings on the matter.

"About the autopsy," Ballard said, "we dug the slug out of the back of the chair, so we're in no hurry."

Standish hesitated, his glance still thoughtful. "I think," he said slowly, "I'll do it tonight if I can get Dr. Loomis to assist."

Ballard's left brow climbed. For a brief moment the gray eyes seemed suspicious, then a smile erased the doubt. "Whatever you say," he remarked. "Just so Mary don't blame me for keeping you up half the night."

Standish made no reply, but went into the hall and down the narrow stairs to the sidewalk. Overhead, the sky was cloudy, but the air was reasonably cool, and he stopped a moment to fill his lungs while he located the police car which had brought him. As he started for it he saw two men and a woman getting out of another police car, and when they started for the doorway that he had just vacated he decided this must be the Keith girl.

Here in the dark and shadowed street he could not tell much about her, except that she seemed young and looked tall for a girl. The summery dress she wore revealed her slenderness, and a light, hip-length jacket covered her shoulders. Beyond this he knew only that she was blonde and walked between the two detectives silently and with head bowed.

Paul Standish worked late that night. Assisted by Dr. Loomis, a young man who often helped him on a fee basis, as Standish had once helped Old Doc Lathrop, he performed the autopsy. He also summoned the city chemist and put him to work on a problem that still occupied the specialist when the medical men had finished. Even then Standish did not go home, but went instead to his office in the morgue; and unlocking the filing cabinets he studied the report he had once made on the traffic death of Walter Tremaine.

At eleven o'clock the next morn-

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ing he walked into the sizable detective's room which adjoined Lieutenant Ballard's office and saw again the girl he had noticed the night before. She sat just outside Ballard's door, as oblivious of the two plainclothes men who were typing reports as they were of her, oblivious of everything apparently, since she sat rigidly erect, her eyes fixed and glassy, her hands clenched, her thin, high-cheekboned face under the ash-blonde hair tight, colorless, and shiny with perspiration and fatigue.

The doctor in Standish noticed these and other signs which spoke of a hovering hysteria; as a man he was aware of the slanting, deep-set eyes, the long lashes, the full mobile mouth. He had a feeling she did not even see him as he passed in front of her and opened the door.

Lieutenant Ballard was slumped in his desk chair, his appearance suggesting that he had had even less sleep than Standish. His sandy hair was rumpled, so were his clothes. A shave would have done him no harm. For all of this, his greeting was cheerful. "Hi, Doc," he said. "Sit down."

Standish sat down and asked if it was all right to hear the story. Ballard said it was simple. He said the murdered man, George Fleming, had been bothering Sylvia Keith. She was used to being bothered by men, her job being what it was, but Fleming carried it too far. He was persistent, annoying, objectionable, and when he learned that Ralph Estey was in love with the girl and taking up her time, he took the attitude that if he, Fleming, couldn't have her, neither could Estey.

There was this fight already mentioned, with Estey taking the beating. Estey, who worked for a small-loan company, had a permit to carry a gun. He had gone to Fleming's apartment last night, shot him, and ran out.

"Have you got him?" Standish asked.

Ballard shook his head and stood up. "No," he said shortly, "but we will." He walked to the window and back. "We've got the station, bus terminal, and airport covered. Stakeouts on Estey's apartment, the girl's, the office where he worked. The alarm is—"

He seemed about to add to this, and then, his glance narrowing, he looked at Standish. "Why all the interest?" he said. "There's no doubt about Fleming dying from that gunshot wound, is there?"

"None. The trouble is," Standish said quietly, "I think someone fed him chloral hydrate before the shooting."

Ballard, in the act of sitting down, clamped his hands on the desk and stayed where he was. "Chloral hydrate?" he shouted. "Knockout drops?" He let himself slowly into the chair. "How do you know?" he demanded.

Standish explained about the folded white paper he had found. He said he recognized it as a "powder

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paper" used in putting up prescriptions. It was easy enough to analyze the few specks that remained, a much lengthier and more difficult job to be sure that chloral had actually been ingested.

"There isn't any doubt about it, Tom," he said. "I'm stating so in my report."

For a long moment Ballard continued to stare at Standish. Then, abruptly, he jumped up and began to pace the room. He made three fast circuits of the desk. He stopped in front of Standish, his face flushed and his mouth grim.

"There have been times when I needed help from you—and got it," he said, as though all this was the doctor's fault. "But this isn't one of them. We'll pick up Estey before the day is over. We've got the motive and the opportunity. The D.A.'ll go before the Grand Jury next week and ask for an indictment, and I say he'll get it."

He gulped and said, "If anybody gave Fleming chloral hydrate, then I say it was that dame outside. They could have been in this together. Did you get a good look at her?" he demanded. "She's not exactly pretty but she's got something. The kind that men would fight over. She wanted young Estey, and Fleming got in the way, and the two of them—"

He did not finish the thought, realizing perhaps that it sounded too far-fetched. After a moment he sank back into the chair.

"I don't know who gave it to Fleming," Standish said. "But the way to do it would be in food or drink. Probably a drink. Open that little packet when Fleming wasn't looking, dump it into a highball, and wait. That stuff works fast, and when Fleming passed out, whoever did it washed and dried the glasses —the dish towel was still damp— cleaned up, threw the folded 'powder paper' at the wastebasket under the sink. And missed, just as I did with the paper towel."

Ballard said nothing, and Standish unbuttoned his jacket and leaned forward in his chair, a new narrowness masking eyes that were now thoughtful and remote.

"This Fleming was a mean one. Up twice for assault and once for manslaughter, you said. The sort you might hire if you wanted someone put out of the way."

"The guy would cool off his own brother if the price was right," Ballard said. And then, as a new thought struck him, "Why?"

"I was wondering if perhaps someone hired him to run down Walter Tremaine and fake that accident."

Ballard's face twisted in a scowl. "Wait a minute!"

Standish went on quickly, his tone quiet but intent as he explained how he had gone over that three-month-old case and refreshed his memory.

"Follow me," he said. "Tremaine was a partner in a prosperous brokerage house. He liked to drink, but he didn't do it during the week. Like

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a lot of others, he stepped out Saturday nights, always at the same night club for dinner and dancing and drinking.

"He always got drunk but he always behaved himself. He never left until the place closed at one o'clock. He had a good-looking wife quite a lot younger than he was, who also liked to step out and have a few drinks—though never as many as Tremaine."

He paused and said, "This Saturday night they came out of the club and started across the street between two parked cars. It was then one twenty-eight. Twenty minutes before that, George Fleming came out of a small bar farther up the street. He'd been there over two hours, and during that time he'd had but two highballs. He had trouble starting the car—a second-hand one—which delayed him just long enough. He finally got it going—this is his story, remember—pulled out into the street, and was accelerating fast when Tremaine and his wife stepped from between those cars into his path."

Standish tipped one hand. "Fleming hit Tremaine nearly head-on, killing him almost instantly. The wife was untouched. When she calmed down she explained her escape by saying she thought that her husband—drunk as he was—had been able to shove her backward to safety just before the car struck him. And there was no doubt about his condition. I did an autopsy as soon as I could and the percentage of blood alcohol indicated a condition close to a stupor at the time he was killed."

Ballard, who had been listening closely, shook his head. "What does that prove, except that it was another accident? Your medical testimony supported that theory, and the court must have accepted it as such."

"Because it was the only conclusion possible at the time. If it could have been shown that there was any connection between Fleming and Walter Tremaine, or any of the three people who benefited by his death—"

"But there wasn't any connection."

"Not then."

"Not even now."

"What I'm saying is that an accident such as happened to Tremaine could be a very clever method of murder and very difficult to prove. And if someone had a drink with Fleming and fed him the chloral hydrate—" He let the sentence dangle and took a sheet of paper from his pocket.

"Here's what I mean," he said. "I did some checking this morning before I came over here. Walter Tremaine's estate was roughly about fifty thousand net, which went to his wife. But there was also a hundred-thousand-dollar life-insurance policy with a double indemnity clause. A second regular hundred-thousand-dollar business policy, payable to Warren Choate, his part-

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ner, to be used to buy out Tremaine's equity in the partnership. Choate carried the same sort of policy and for the same reason, the idea being that should either die, the hundred thousand was to be paid to the dead man's heirs, the survivor then owning the business outright."

He hesitated to see if Ballard was following him, and then went on. "Now, Tremaine has a younger brother, Donald, who will be thirty-five October twenty-seventh. The father left an estate of something over a hundred grand, but he apparently had no confidence in Donald, because he left Donald's half in trust, with Walter in control. On his thirty-fifth birthday Donald gets the fifty thousand—he would have received it anyway—but with Walter dead here's how it works out:

"The widow gets, roughly, fifty thousand from Tremaine's estate, plus half the double-indemnity policy—one hundred thousand—plus half of the business policy—fifty thousand. That adds up to about two hundred thousand. The brother, Donald, gets the other hundred thousand on the double-indemnity policy, plus the remaining half of the business policy—a hundred and fifty thousand in all. But"—Standish tapped the paper against his palm—"it is not payable until the brother reaches thirty-five."

Ballard was not particularly interested, but he listened because Standish was a friend of long standing. Now he roused himself and said, "All right. The widow got her two hundred thousand when Tremaine died. The partner got the business. The brother will get a hundred and fifty grand when he's thirty-five, plus the fifty held in trust from his father's estate. Maybe they're all happy that Walter Tremaine got knocked off. They're certainly all richer because of it. But where does George Fleming come into the picture?"

He went on quickly without waiting for an answer. What he said carried no overtones of animosity or ridicule—because he had known Standish as an intern and suspected, even then, that the young doctor had a keen interest in crime. He believed that Standish continued to act as medical examiner because of this interest, though this was something Standish had never admitted, even to himself.

"Look, Doc," he said. "This time I think I've got the answer. I think the D.A.'ll get an indictment. You come up with some real proof to support your theory and I'll listen. Until then let's leave it a police job."

Standish put away his paper and stood up. He said maybe Ballard was right. It was just an idea of his, and somehow he did not think the answer was as simple as Ballard wanted it to be. Then, as a new thought came to him, he said, "What about that girl out there? Are you holding her?"

"I hadn't thought about it. Why?"

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"She looks as if she's taken about all she can take. I'm afraid she might blow up on you."

"Hysterics, you mean?" Ballard looked concerned. "What do you think I should do?"

"Well—if you don't have to hold her I'll take her home and give her a couple pills. She'll make more sense if she has a chance to relax."

Ballard listened with respect. "Sure," he said. "Do that, will you? I don't want any trouble with her."

He opened the door and led Standish over to the girl, who seemed not to have moved a muscle since he had last seen her. Her thin face was still tight and grayish, the eyes fixed.

"This is Dr. Standish," Ballard said. "Miss Keith . . . He'll take you home."

Standish took the girl's arm. Under the thin jacket her body seemed stiff and unyielding as he took her downstairs and helped her into his car. Not until they were under way did she speak.

"It was my fault," she said hollowly.

"That young Estey shot him?" Standish said to lead her on.

"Ralph didn't shoot him." She sat up, and for the first time a trace of color showed in her cheeks. "He couldn't do a thing like that. Never."

"He had a gun."

"I know, but—"

"Then how was it your fault?"

"I shouldn't have made dates with Ralph or let him know how much I liked him. I knew George Fleming was cruel and mean. Most men will leave you alone once you show them you dislike them, but George persisted. He came to the club every night and waited until it closed so he could take me home. I should have complained to the police; I should have settled it with George before I paid any attention to Ralph.

"But he was so different. Not like most of them who leer at you, and make passes, and nasty cracks when you brush them off, Ralph wanted me to quit my job. He was in love with me. I told him about George, but he said he could handle that." She put her head down, her voice small. "Only, he couldn't."

"It isn't your fault Estey had the gun."

"Oh, yes. In a way it is. After they had that fight Ralph said George would never beat him up again. He had this gun in his office and he said he was going to carry it, and I encouraged him. I knew George was a bully, but I thought he was a coward, too."

"If Estey is innocent why should the police have to chase him now?"

"I don't know." She caught her breath in a half sob. "Unless he went up there and found George already dead and—got panicky when he saw how it would look."

Standish gave her a few seconds of silence and then began gently to question her about herself. In this he was effective, because presently she was talking fast, the words tumbling

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out, as though this was a release too long denied her.

He found out that she lived only two blocks from his apartment and garaged her car in the same place he did. He discovered that she came from some small town in Ohio, that she was twenty-one, that she had aspirations toward the stage and had, in fact, put in two years in summer stock. She had not given up hope, in spite of her lack of success, and was, in fact, working as a combination hat-check-and-cigarette girl because she could make more money that way than any other way she knew. With her savings she had, until she met Ralph Estey, intended to try again on Broadway.

He glanced at her from time to time as she continued, and while the doctor in him realized that his therapy had cured for a time the threatened hysteria, the man in him became aware of her physical attractiveness. He had accepted the fact that her tall lithe slenderness was neatly rounded, that she had nice hands and ankles; now he knew that while her cheekbones were too prominent to class her face as pretty, her mouth was soft and full and her eyes, large and green and just faintly upward slanting under rather heavy brows, were striking. Remembering what Ballard had said earlier, he agreed that she could, given the proper circumstances, be a girl whom men would quarrel over.

That she seemed entirely unaware of this did not lessen her appeal, and now, as he approached his office, he said he would like to stop a moment before taking her home.

Mary Hayward was working on the doctor's books when he ushered Sylvia Keith into his office. She acknowledged the introduction coolly and because it was not Standish's custom to bring good-looking young women into his office, eyed them both with some suspicion as the doctor seated the girl and turned to his medicine cabinet. She watched him shake two pills into the palm of his hand and get a glass of water.

She said, "Mrs. Rupert called, Doctor. And the Kline boy's mother. I told them you'd stop and see them before office hours." She glanced at her watch. "It's ten minutes after twelve now."

Standish recognized the businesslike, peremptory tone. It was the sort of tone that Mary employed when she did not entirely approve of him. She used it when Lieutenant Ballard made what she thought were unwarranted demands on the doctor's time; she used it when she thought he was neglecting his private practice or slighting wealthy patients who had wealthy friends.

Because he understood her, the implied censure amused rather than annoyed Standish; for Mary Hayward was young—perhaps two years older than Sylvia Keith—and just as softly feminine and attractive after hours as she was competent and efficient in her white uniform. Her hair was brown, with glints of

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copper in it when the light was right. Her eyes, brown like her hair, were wise and understanding. There was a sprinkling of freckles on the bridge of her nose and she had a clean fresh look about her that was as decorative as it was genuine.

"All right, Mary," he said. "I'll make the calls if you'll drive Miss Keith home. She's had a rather rough time with Lieutenant Ballard and she needs to relax."

"Ballard," Mary said, finding the word distasteful. "Oh, well, whatever you say, Doctor."

Standish handed Sylvia Keith a little envelope containing four more pills. "Take one of these when you get home," he said, "and lock the door and climb into bed. And don't worry too much about Ralph Estey."

He hesitated, wondering if he should tell this girl what he knew, then deciding he should. "You see, someone administered chloral hydrate—what they call knockout drops—to Fleming before he was shot, probably in a drink. There weren't any fingerprints to prove it, but—"

"In a drink?" The thick brows climbed and the green eyes opened wide. "But"—she broke off and began again with quick excitement—"but that would prove it couldn't have been Ralph. He wouldn't have a drink with George. George wouldn't ask him. They hated each other."

She went on, elaborating the idea until Standish interrupted her.

"It's still only supposition," he reminded her, "but it gives us something to think about. Now, you run along and do what the doctor ordered . . . There's just one thing more: If Estey should get in touch with you, I'd try to convince him to give himself up before the police find him. Have him phone me if he'd rather do it that way."

Dr. Standish's office hours were from 1:30 to 3:00, but it was twenty minutes of four before the last patient had been administered to and the office cleared. There had been no opportunity for Mary Hayward to discuss the business of Sylvia Keith, and because Standish did not want to go into the matter now he gave her an order, not as a friend but as a doctor to his nurse.

"Call Choate and Tremaine in the First National Bank Building," he said, "and tell Mr. Choate that Dr. Standish would like to see him as soon as possible at my office in the morgue. Then call Mrs. Tremaine—you'll find her in the phone book—and Donald Tremaine."

Mary's mouth tightened and her voice was distant, businesslike, disapproving. "Suppose I can't locate all of them."

"Do the best you can."

He got out fast then, stopping en route to pay a professional visit to an ailing patient and arriving at the morgue at 4:30. Here, on the second floor, was the official office of the medical examiner, a two-room suite

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no different from thousands of other small business enterprises, the larger, outer office occupied by a secretary and a clerk and featuring long rows of metal filing cabinets.

"Mrs. Tremaine and Mr. Choate are in your office," the secretary said. "Mary called to say she had been unable to locate Donald Tremaine."

Paul Standish had seen Evelyn Tremaine from a distance at the trial of George Fleming. He had remembered her as an attractive woman, but now, as he entered his private office and saw her sitting in one of the leather chairs, the word that came to him was *striking*. For she was a statuesque, high-breasted woman with jet-black hair, creamy skin, and eyes that looked black under their carefully arched brows. Her hair was drawn back to a knot at the nape, giving her somehow a classic look that complemented the almost symmetric planes and angles of her face; a coldly beautiful face in repose, and yet one which to Standish seemed to promise warmth and mobility if one could find the proper stimuli.

At least, that was the impression he got in that first long moment of inspection before he glanced at Warren Choate and found him to be a prosperous-looking man in his middle forties, a vigorous, well-set-up fellow with good shoulders.

Standish thanked the two for coming. He walked behind his desk and said he supposed they were wondering why he wanted to see them, and Choate said as a matter of fact they were. Standish sat down and asked if Mr. Choate had read about the murder of George Fleming.

Mr. Choate had. Mr. Choate was also aware that this same George Fleming had run down his partner, and Mrs. Tremaine's husband, a few months ago.

"Have they found the man who killed Fleming yet?" he asked.

Standish said no, and then adopted an attitude that was confidential but purposely accented with mild overtones of mystery and ambiguity.

"We"—he used the word because it sounded better—"are trying to clear up a few little things," he said. "Not officially as yet, but just to get the record straight. As I understand it you're now the sole owner of Choate and Tremaine."

Choate said that was correct, the partnership insurance having been paid over in equal parts to Mrs. Tremaine and to Tremaine's brother.

"But Donald Tremaine's half was not paid over in cash, was it?" Standish said. "I understood it was to be held, like his share of his father's estate, until Donald was thirty-five. Why was that? Didn't his brother trust him?"

"It wasn't the brother so much; it was the father." Choate glanced at Evelyn Tremaine. "It seems Donald got in a scrape when he was in college and the old man cracked down on him, kept him pretty much under the thumb right up until he died, I guess. Left half his estate to

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Donald but in trust, with Walter handling it. Apparently Walter made out his insurance the same way."

"Donald didn't resent it?"

"He may have."

Standish nodded again. "What's he like?"

"Donald?" Choate turned one hand over. "A nice enough guy. Quiet. Too quiet, maybe. A junior partner in a firm of accountants," he said, and mentioned the name.

"Did he have any money of his own?"

"A few thousand invested in stocks that he'd saved."

Standish considered this while he evaluated the cost of Choate's sharkskin suit. "He never married? No girls?"

"None that I know of." Choate grinned. "I guess he's a little shy."

Standish turned to the woman. He asked if she had received her money after her husband's death.

"The insurance part, yes. The rest of the estate is still in probate."

Standish digressed abruptly and spoke of the accident that killed her husband. "Sometimes," he said, "a long time after a thing like that has happened, a person will remember a detail or impression that escaped him earlier. I wonder if there was anything more you could tell me."

He watched her shake her head, saw her gaze drop. After a moment she took a deep breath. "No," she said. "Frankly, I've been trying my best to forget it."

Standish said he could understand why. He said it was a miracle that she had escaped uninjured. "As I recall it," he added, "you fell, but the car did not actually touch you."

"I still don't know why," she said, her glance still averted. "All I'll ever remember is the lights of that car and the sound of the motor, and that frightful crash and the scream of brakes just as I fell to my knees. I thought I'd been hit until I looked up, and then—"

She broke off, shuddering, and Standish saw the convulsive movement in her throat.

Across the room Warren Choate coughed. "I still don't understand just why we're here, Doctor."

"I've been wondering," he said quietly, "if there was any connection between George Fleming and Walter Tremaine—if perhaps Tremaine's death was not accidental but premeditated."

Choate leaned quickly forward, his jaw tightening. "Premeditated? That's the silliest thing I ever heard of!"

"I'm merely considering that possibility."

"Nuts." Choate leaned back. He glanced at the woman, who sat wide-eyed and unmoving in her chair, her lips parted. "The court was satisfied and so was the insurance company."

"With a life policy and double indemnity," Standish said, "it wouldn't matter to the insurance company whether death was homicidal or accidental."

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"What is that—a hunch? Or have you got evidence?"

Standish was in a corner and he knew it. "One or two little things," he said, hedging.

"Such as what?"

"I'm not at liberty to say now."

Choate stood up suddenly, red-faced and grim. "I think I've had enough of this," he said. "I resent the imposition of being asked down here to listen to such nonsense, and I think I can speak for Mrs. Tremaine when I say that I don't believe any part of what you've said."

He stepped toward the woman as she rose. "If you have anything remotely resembling proof or any factual evidence we'll be glad to cooperate in any way we can. Until that time I'm sure Mrs. Tremaine would rather not discuss the matter here or anywhere else."

He opened the door, touched Evelyn Tremaine's arm gently as she preceded him, and followed her from the room.

Donald Tremaine occupied the second floor of a remodeled brownstone in a still desirable neighborhood. He had a highball in his hand when he opened the door and he recognized Standish before the doctor could introduce himself.

"Oh, hello," he said. "It's Dr. Standish, isn't it? Come in, won't you? Let me get you a drink."

He led the way into a tastefully furnished living room and seemed a little hurt at Standish's refusal to join him. He waved toward one of the maroon-covered wing chairs which flanked the small fireplace and went over to turn off the 5:30 newscast on the table radio.

He was a nice-looking man, small-boned but well proportioned, with close-cropped curly hair and thin-rimmed spectacles which served to magnify slightly his blue eyes. His voice was affable and well-modulated, and his formal manner was marked as he offered a silver cigarette box before he sat down with his highball.

"Is this an official visit, Doctor?" he asked. "I mean, does it have anything to do with this Fleming fellow who ran down my brother?" He indicated a folded newspaper on the coffee table.

"That's the way the police see it."

Tremaine adjusted his glasses. "Is there any doubt about it?"

Standish smiled. He said that theoretically there was always some doubt.

"Yes," Tremaine said, "I suppose that's true." He hesitated reflectively. "You're not quite satisfied, is that it?"

Standish ducked that one and changed the subject. "I talked to Warren Choate and Mrs. Tremaine. They told me you'd never married."

"That's correct," Tremaine said agreeably. "Couldn't afford it."

"You'll be able to afford it once you're thirty-five."

"True enough. Things will be a bit different then." He smiled as he

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replied, taking no offense and remaining polite and unruffled as he finished his highball.

Standish went on pleasantly, saying that he understood Tremaine would receive $200,000.

"About that," Tremaine said.

"Didn't you ever resent it? Having to wait until you were thirty-five before you could touch your half of the estate?"

"Certainly I resented it—not that it did any good." Tremaine glanced into his empty glass and stood up. "I need a small refill," he said. "Excuse me. Sure you won't join me?"

He disappeared through a doorway and Standish looked about, noticing the tailored slipcovers, the half-dozen prints on the walls, the few antique tables and stands which rounded out the room. He selected a cigarette from the silver box, found he had no matches, and stood up to look for one. When he saw the small gold lighter on the mantel he picked it up and thumbed off the cap.

There was no wheel to spin but there was a tiny lever, which he pressed. Not until then did he realize that it was not a cigarette lighter but a miniature atomizer which sprayed not flame but perfume, a small cloud of which was immediately deposited on his hand and jacket cuff.

He replaced the gadget to rub the spray from his hand, the sweet, spicy odor beginning to clog his nostrils. He backed away from the mantel. After that he began to wonder what a feminine accessory of that kind was doing in the apartment of a shy and quiet man who had the reputation of having no girl friends.

Glancing up as Tremaine came back into the room with a fresh highball, he kept his distance, conscious of his perfumed condition but finding no sign that his host was aware of it. When Tremaine dropped into the wing chair, Standish walked over to the davenport.

"About this Fleming fellow," Tremaine said, still gracious. "Just what is it that bothers you about the police theory? Or"—his eyes smiled behind the glasses—"have you one of your own? You see, I'm interested, because the moment I read about Fleming it occurred to me that it was a coincidence that he should die as violently as my brother."

Standish studied his host with some amazement, wondering how he could continue to be so casually polite; then, going a step farther, wondering if possibly his attitude was but a pose.

"I haven't any theory at the moment," he said finally. "Call it idle speculation, based on the remote possibility that Fleming's murder was no coincidence, but instead was planned that way."

"Planned?" The smile vanished.

"I'm not a policeman," Standish said. "I don't think like a policeman. They think they know who killed Fleming and why, but as medical examiner I've discovered certain irregularities."

He leaned forward, got a whiff of

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his perfumed sleeve, and moved his arm. "Vehicular homicide is a tricky thing," he said. "Because of the circumstances and your brother's condition Fleming was let off lightly. On the other hand, Fleming, from what I could learn about him, is the sort who could be hired for such a job if someone was clever enough to recognize the possibilities of a traffic murder and plan properly.

"For the sake of argument let's say someone did hire Fleming and paid him off. Suppose Fleming spent the money and then realized what a wonderful extortion setup he had. Under such circumstances the one who hired him might decide that another murder was the only way out."

He stood up, aware that Tremaine was watching him. "The reason I wanted to talk to you and your sister-in-law and Mr. Choate was to see if you might know of anything that would help to support that hypothesis."

Tremaine put his glass aside and stood up, his smile fixed now, but still looking every inch the gentleman. "Very interesting," he said stiffly. "Very. And did you discover anything important?"

"Nothing definite." Standish's glance flicked to the atomizer on the mantel and moved on. "Except to verify the fact that each one of you is much better off financially since your brother's death."

It was nearly six when Paul Standish reached his offices, and he was surprised to see Mary Hayward working over the monthly statements.

"Hey," he said, "you're working late."

"So are you," Mary said, not looking up.

Standish slipped off his jacket. He glanced at his work book and learned that he would have to make three house calls that evening, none of them urgent.

Then Mary spoke, "Are you going to tell me about it?"

"All right," he said, and proceeded to do so, because he liked to talk things over with her after the day's work was done. When he finished, Mary sighed audibly. "I was afraid of it," she said.

"Of what?"

"You know what. I knew when you brought that girl in here this morning and told her about the chloral hydrate that you'd never let it go at that."

"What did you think of her, Mary?"

"Oh, she's all right. She told me what happened and how she felt it was all her fault. I couldn't help feeling sorry for her." She got up and poured herself a drink. "I don't know what it is exactly, but she has something that's appealing about her."

Standish thought his over. He had left this appeal himself, but it had seemed more of a physical thing and not a quality he thought a woman would notice. He pursued

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the thought in silence until he realized that Mary had sat up and was sniffing the air.

"Have you seen her since?" she asked sharply. 'is that where that perfume came from?" She watched Standish chuckle, her impatience mounting. "Or was it Mrs. Tremaine?"

Standish told her of the atomizer in Donald Tremaine's apartment. He said its presence did not exactly corroborate Warren Choate's statement that Tremaine had no girl friends.

But Mary was not to be put off. Once satisfied that the perfume incident was not important, she said, "I suppose if you insist on being medical examiner instead of building up your private practice you have to give it a certain amount of time. I can even understand it when Lieutenant Ballard sometimes comes to you for help. But this—well, I mean I don't understand your going around asking these people a lot of personal questions when it's really none of your business. Or is it?" she demanded.

"Technically, no," Standish had to admit. "It's just that I don't think Ballard has the answer to that murder. At least, not all of it. If Fleming's death was a gang killing, no one would have bothered, to give him chloral hydrate—Ballard admits that. Yet someone did. I can't see two men who hated each other like Fleming and Estey having a drink together in Fleming's apartment."

"Have you found any connection between Fleming and either Warren Choate, Donald Tremaine, or Mrs. Tremaine?"

"No."

"Then why—?"

"Because if—and I admit it's a big *if*—someone *did* hire Fleming to run down Walter Tremaine, then you *have* to consider one of them. The brother comes into two hundred thousand instead of fifty thousand when he's thirty-five. Mrs. Tremaine is now a fairly wealthy widow, and Choate is now the sole owner of a business that supported two men handsomely."

Mary took some of her drink. She sighed again. She remained unconvinced. "But all that is not your job," she said. "If you had any real evidence you'd go to Ballard, wouldn't you? But you haven't any evidence, and how can you hope to get any if the police can't?"

Standish had thought about that. In general he agreed with Mary's logic. The trouble was, Ballard was convinced that Ralph Estey had done the job, and he was not, therefore, looking for evidence that did not support the premise.

"I could get Lee Cheney," he said.

Lee Cheney was a private detective. Standish had used him occasionally in the past when he needed additional investigation. There was, in fact, an item in the budget for just such expense and heretofore the results that Lee Cheney produced more than justified his fees.

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"Cheney?" Mary said, her voice shocked. "Oh, no."

Standish eyed the floor, and his bony face looked tired. "If there's anything in my idea, Cheney'll unearth it," he said.

"But, Paul!" Mary took a breath, the use of his first name during office hours testifying to her agitation. "That sort of investigation doesn't belong in your department. Suppose you're wrong. You can't charge that expense to—"

"No," Standish interrupted, "I can't. If I'm wrong I'll have to pay Cheney out of my own pocket."

Mary put her empty glass down with a bang. "Why, of course," she said with heavy sarcasm. "By all means. With all that money you make being medical examiner you can easily afford it." She stood up, hesitated, and now her eyes were concerned.

"Will you tell me one thing?" she asked. "Why? Is it that Keith girl? Are you doing it for her? Or just because you think the Estey boy is innocent? If he is, why did he run away?"

Standish considered the questions soberly, for they were sound questions and ones which he had heretofore been able to ignore.

He thought about Sylvia Keith. He thought of her pathetic hopelessness as she sat outside Ballard's office, the story she had told him in the car, and the sincerity of her conviction that the blame for what had happened was deservedly hers. In all honesty he could not tell to what extent his concern for her had influenced him, both as a doctor and as a man, and as he sought an answer, he considered the Estey boy the police were still looking for.

He stirred in his chair, his surroundings temporarily forgotten. Why, he asked himself, should there have been traces of chloral hydrate? Why? And in his search for an answer the words of Old Doc Lathrop came back to him.

"The truth always rings true," Lathrop had said, "but the appearance of truth varies widely."

And so it was now. Was it the truth that Ballard had, or only the appearance of truth? This was what bothered him, and it was as if one part of his brain, heeding Mary's warning, was telling him, "Let it go. These are prominent people you have been questioning. They can make trouble for you for overstepping your authority."

And then that other part of his mind adding, "Something is funny. It doesn't ring true. Maybe when the police find Ralph Estey and he tells his story you'll be satisfied. Until that time you've got to keep looking for the answer."

He shook his head as if to clear it, and turned to tell Mary how he felt. But Mary wasn't there. He had not heard her leave, but as he swiveled his chair the door of the dressing room opened and she stepped out, white uniform replaced by a lightweight beige suit. When Standish

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saw how smart and attractive she looked, he smiled cheerfully.

"Wait a minute, Mary," he said. "Let me call Cheney and then we'll go out and have dinner."

Mary shook her head, her soft brown hair waving. "No," she said with quiet severity, as though detecting the spurious quality of his cheerfulness, "we won't have dinner. I have some things in the fridge for dinner, thank you just the same. Good night, Doctor."

Standish watched the door close, his disappointment showing and the tired lines working again on his face. He sighed heavily. Finally he swiveled back to his desk and began to jot things down on a pad. Then he lifted the telephone.

When Lee Cheney answered, Standish briefed him first in general terms. He mentioned the three people who interested him most and said he wanted to find out what they had been doing during the past several weeks, particularly in a social way. Who, of the opposite sex—if anyone—had Warren Choate, Evelyn, and Donald Tremaine been seeing lately? What did they do evenings?

"I'm interested in bank accounts, too," he said, and mentioned the date of Walter Tremaine's death. "Particularly during the period of, say, a week before and a week after the accident."

The private detective, who had answered in grunts, found his voice. "What am I?" he asked plaintively. "Houdini? You can't get bank records without a subpoena."

"You can get the information confidentially if you're on the ball. Later, if we get anything, maybe we can get subpoenas. Anyway, do the best you can," he said, "and also see what you can find out about George Fleming's financial status the last three months."

Cheney's reply was unenthusiastic. "I'll need some help," he said.

"Sure. Put a couple of men on it with you. And, Lee, I think I'd like a man to watch Donald Tremaine's place." He mentioned the address and described Tremaine. "I'd like to know if he has any callers. If he goes out, have him followed."

Cheney grunted. "Make it three men to help me," he said. "It'll cost you about a hundred bucks a day plus expenses."

Paul Standish sat at his desk for some time after he hung up. He was never sure how long, but dusk was coating the windows when the shrilling of the telephone startled him. When he answered it, the voice of Lieutenant Ballard came to him, blunt and demanding.

"I'll pick you up in front of your office in three minutes, Doc," he said.

Ballard was on time. He was driving a city car and was alone. He had the car accelerating before Standish could shut the door.

"I told you we'd get Estey," he said.

Standish made no reply, because, at the speed they were traveling, he

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felt safer with the lieutenant's full attention on his driving. In front of a grimy, empty-windowed brick building, where three police cars stood, Ballard slammed on his brakes. Standish got out and started for the doorway. He reached the sidewalk before a hand grabbed his arm.

"Not in there, Doc," Ballard said, his voice flat. "Here," And then he was swiveling Standish toward a five-year-old sedan he hadn't noticed.

It stood between two of the police cars, its windows down, and somehow Standish found himself looking in at the stiff distorted body, the torso of which lay flat along the seat, an ugly stain discoloring one side of the gray face and serving to obscure the tiny hole in the temple and the powder burns which rimmed it.

He opened the door and leaned inside, his practiced fingers moving automatically. Then he asked about the gun.

"It was under him," Ballard said. "The slug went through his head and stuck in here." He indicated the upholstered frame piece between the doors. "A .32 automatic," he said, "and ballistics is already checking it, not that there's much doubt that it's the same one that killed Fleming. How long's he been dead?"

"Probably more than twelve hours. How much longer, I don't know."

"Sure," Ballard said. "Did it last night. Ran out after he shot Fleming, rode around while he figured out the score, and took the easy way out sometime during the night. How close would you say the gun was held?"

"Inches, probably. It's not a contact wound."

Ballard was satisfied. He admitted the department had slipped up because they hadn't known that Estey had a car, explaining that it had first been noticed early that morning but hadn't been closely inspected because there was nothing suspicious about it. Only when a curious policeman finally looked inside was the discovery made.

He said other things, but Standish did not hear him. His gaze remained fixed on the body of Ralph Estey, in life a stocky man who might have been in his middle twenties, with unruly brown hair and a broad bony face. Something beyond the presence of death left him oddly shaken and upset inside.

The physical facts of suicide were plain. And yet, even as he accepted them, one small part of his mind remained doggedly unconvinced. No matter how he argued with himself, he still had no explanation for the chloral hydrate which had been found in Fleming's body. The trouble was that now this lone, contrary fact was no longer enough.

The doctor had no time for extracurricular investigations until late afternoon of the next day. He was busy that morning with the postmortem, which served only to sub-

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stantiate the suicide verdict; his office patients came in greater numbers than usual, and after that he had to make bedside visits.

When he returned to the office some time after four o'clock, Lee Cheney was waiting in the anteroom, a smallish sharp-nosed man of indeterminate age.

The details that he and his men had uncovered were many and varied. Out of them certain discoveries loomed as important. The first was that Warren Choate, a widower, had been quietly dining a woman in black during the past several weeks.

"A brunette," Cheney added, "who always wears a hat with a half veil. Nobody knows her name."

"How often?"

"It's hard to say, but it's always the same dame."

"Good enough," Standish said. "Now, what about Mrs. Tremaine?"

"We kind of drew a blank there." Cheney glanced at his cigarette, which was down to the last half inch, and rubbed it out in a tray. "Stays home a lot, shops by phone mostly. Goes out sometimes in the evening. The neighbors see her leaving around seven or so; they don't always see her come back."

Standish's gaze moved beyond Cheney and stayed there, while a spark of excitement began to glow inside him. "What about Donald Tremaine?"

"Well, we had a better break there." Cheney leaned back, looking a little pleased with himself. "You know the place he lives? Small. One apartment to the floor. The owner has the ground floor flat and he's not only nosy, he has insomnia. It seems," Cheney said, "that Donald has a lady friend who calls once a week, after dark. Generally around nine. The landlord figures she leaves plenty late, because he never sees her go. Except last night."

"Ah-h." The excitement mushroomed in Standish. "A brunette?"

"Yep. generally shows on Mondays, but she was there last night. For about an hour."

Standish came to instant attention.

"Did you put a man on that house, as I told you?"

A grin touched Cheney's eyes. "Yep," he said. "And the guy took a chance. He followed her when she left. A brunette with dark glasses, a good-sized woman with a little veil. Do I have to tell you where she went?"

"To the Tremaine house."

"Right." Cheney crossed his legs and made a comment not in his notes. "It sort of looks," he said, "like our brunette was giving both the boys a play, hunh?"

It took Paul Standish a while to digest what he had heard and to finish with his speculation. Only then was he ready for further information.

"What about the banks?"

"There, too," said Cheney, "I get a break. I start at the National because Choate has offices in the building. All three of them got accounts. I did a little job for the National once, and

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the cashier is friendly so long as I tell him it's confidential and a personal favor."

He consulted his notes and said, "With Choate we're nowhere. His account is too big and too active to show anything special around that date you're interested in. Mrs. Tremaine has had a small account for some time, with an average monthly balance of about three hundred. No sizable deposits or withdrawals until two weeks ago, when I guess the insurance company paid off."

"Donald Tremaine?"

"About the same picture."

Standish considered the information and found it disappointing. "What about George Fleming?"

"No bank account that I could find. Hoods like him never bother with banks." Cheney put his papers away and said, "But maybe this helps, Doc: Fleming was small-time. Until recently. In the past three months he's bought a new model used car for twenty-seven hundred bucks—cash—and a lot of new suits, and he's been giving the ponies a big play without doing much collecting." He stood up: "I guess that's about it."

Standish remained where he was and glumly watched the little detective go. Keeping his thoughts on the financial information he now had, he realized that only in Fleming had he any support for his theory. Fleming had come into money; he could have been hired to run down Walter Tremaine. But by whom?

Warren Choate had the motive and the money, but there was no proof that he had used his money in such a way. Evelyn Tremaine apparently did not even have the cash to pay for such a job at that time—unless she had made a deal with Fleming on credit, which was highly unlikely—and neither did Donald Tremaine. Unless—

He stood up abruptly as the thought hit him, the spark of excitement glowing brightly once again. When he went into the inner office and found Mary Hayward at her desk, he told her he was on his way to see Warren Choate and should be back in less than a half hour.

Most of the office help at Choate & Tremaine had left by the time Standish got there, but the door was unlocked and he went on in, to find Warren Choate just cleaning up his desk. This time the man's face was truculent and stony.

"No," he said when Standish had made his request. "Not a chance."

"But Donald Tremaine does have an account here?"

"That I will answer for you—yes. The rest of it—" He did not finish, but put his hands on the desk and leaned stiff-armed over it. "I told you yesterday I'd cooperate if you had evidence to support your theory; today I understand the police are satisfied that Estey killed Fleming and then shot himself. Under the circumstances if you want to see the records of our clients you'd better get yourself a subpoena, Doctor."

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Standish met the rebuff without rancor. His voice remained even, confident, explicit, even though what he said was mostly bluff.

"Whatever you say, Mr. Choate." Standish sat on the arm of a chair and took his time. "From information I now have I'm still inclined to doubt that Walter Tremaine's death was accidental. I'd prefer to conduct my investigation quietly, but if you insist, I'll go to the police with what I have. I think they can get a subpoena, but the minute they do the newspapers will have it. If you want that publicity now—"

He rose, straightened his jacket, and was almost to the door.

"Just a minute."

Standish stopped.

Choate eyed him with cold resentment, but there was a trace of uncertainty in his voice. "What do you want to know?"

"I want to know what you bought or sold for Donald Tremaine during the month of June."

Choate hesitated, glanced away. Finally he straightened his shoulders; then started around the desk, saying he would check the records.

Standish walked over to the window, aware now of the strain he felt and grinning a little in his relief. He wiped his palms with his handkerchief and was waiting with calm assurance when Choate returned, a worried look on his face.

"He sold a hundred shares of American Factories on June 14 at 50¾."

"That would amount to something over five thousand," Standish said. "Did you credit his account or give him a check?"

"He wanted a check."

"And cashed it?"

"Certainly he cashed it."

Standish said, "Ah-h!" silently as a surge of satisfaction came over him. Aloud he said, "Thank you very much, Mr. Choate."

It was after five when Paul Standish got back to his office from his round of calls, to find Evelyn Tremaine in the anteroom talking to Mary. Apparently the woman had just arrived, since both were standing, and Mary said, "Here he is."

Evelyn Tremaine examined him with humid dark eyes as he said good afternoon and put aside his bag. She wore a smooth-fitting navy dress with a tiny jacket, over the arm of which three stone martens dangled, and the impression she gave was expensive, superior, poised, and impatient. Yet even as he heard her throaty voice asking to see him in private he thought of other things and wondered what this woman would be like once the veneer—and he thought it was a veneer—of aloofness was stripped away.

He motioned her toward the surgery and opened the door, nodding to Mary and the interoffice communicator on her desk. Once inside, he surreptitiously flicked the switch on his instrument and asked the woman to be seated.

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Evelyn Tremaine began by stating frankly that she had come to make a threat. She was aware, she said, of the inquiries he had made of her brother-in-law and Warren Choate; furthermore, the insinuation he had made the day before had so upset her that she had consulted her attorney, who had assured her that Dr. Standish had neither the authority nor the legal right to undertake such an investigation. She said that if he persisted in such unwarranted insinuations she and the others involved would see that the matter was placed before the proper authorities.

Standish let her finish, knowing that she had reasonable grounds for her promised action, even as his mind went on to other things. He said he would like to ask a question.

"You went to see Donald Tremaine last night, I believe?"

Something flickered in the dark depths of her eyes and was gone. "Perhaps."

"You've visited him at his place other times as well."

Again something happened to her eyes, but the look was veiled before he could fathom it. She flicked a piece of lint off her dress, and when she glanced up her smile was studied.

"Visited Donald?" she said with mild hauteur. "Since my husband's death? Don't be ridiculous, Doctor."

"She'll do it, Paul," Mary said, after Mrs. Tremaine had left. "She'll make trouble for you."

Standish's smile was slow and understanding, because he sensed her anxiety and knew her concern was for him. He told her what he had learned from Lee Cheney.

"There's something funny somewhere, Mary," he said.

"But even if you're right, if someone did hire Fleming to run down Mr. Tremaine, you haven't any proof. It couldn't have been Mrs. Tremaine. She didn't have any money."

"She could have been in with someone—either Choate or the brother. She wasn't hurt, remember. Just a little push to a drunken husband at the right time—"

Mary uttered a small distracted cry. "But—it seems so horrible."

"Choate had the money—Donald Tremaine cashed a check for five thousand and made no deposit. This was three days before his brother was killed. What did he do with it?"

"But if you're wrong—you could be, couldn't you?—and they make a formal complaint . . . Suppose there is an official investigation and they remove you from office. Think what it would do to your practice."

Standish swallowed an incipient thickness which had begun working at his throat. "It's a chance I have to take," he said finally. "At least, for a little while longer."

The Club Neilan was not one of the city's best, but it was popular, largely because of its excellent orchestra and moderate minimum.

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The cloakroom was in the little foyer just off the street, and when Paul Standish walked in that night at 10:30 he was not sure just why he had come.

Originally, his decision had been based on the desire to offer Sylvia Keith his sympathy and tell her he was not yet satisfied with the suicide theory; now that he was here he wondered if this was but an excuse to talk to her, to know her.

She stood in the little cubby with another girl, both dressed in dark, low-cut frocks trimmed with white, and the instant she saw him her upward-slanting eyes beamed their recognition and she did the best she could with a smile. She opened the hinged counter and stepped out. She shook hands before she took his hat and passed it to her companion.

She said, "I'm glad you came."

Standish asked if they could sit down for a few minutes, and she said yes, and spoke to the other girl. Then she was leading him into the front room by the bar, where there were some tables for those who were unimpressed by the inner room with its dance floor and orchestra.

When they were seated and he had ordered, he asked if she was sure this was not against the rules, and she reassured him, adding that she was breaking in another girl.

"I'm quitting when I can," she said. "I couldn't stand it, working in a place like this after what happened to Ralph."

Standish said he understood. He told her a little about what he had been doing, and as he talked he realized how thin and drawn her face seemed now, the high cheekbones and the hollows beneath them serving to accent the fullness of her mouth. In the subdued light her blonde hair was fine-textured and clean, the tawny skin smooth and only lightly touched by cosmetics.

"Did George Fleming seem to have plenty of money?" he asked.

"Why, yes." She glanced up. "He had a nice car and—yes, I think he did."

Without mentioning any names, Standish spoke of the $5000 that Donald Tremaine had received but had not deposited. "There's a chance," he said, "that maybe we can make two and two equal four."

He saw her lips work and grow still. She took a quick breath, her breasts tightening against the fabric of her dress. Then she looked right at him, leaning closer so that he could see only the intriguing depths of her green eyes.

"You think this person paid George five thousand dollars to—"

"To run down Walter Tremaine," Standish finished. "I think the accident was framed. I think maybe George was running out of money and decided he could get more. Maybe the one who hired him recognized the perpetual threat and decided to do something about it.

"That would explain the chloral hydrate, but shooting Fleming like that would not be quite enough. The

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killer had to be sure he would never be blamed; he needed another frame as clever as the first one, because that's the way his mind worked."

He took a breath and said, "In his talks with Fleming he found out about the trouble Fleming was having with Estey. He might even have made a date with Estey and gone directly there after he finished with Fleming. Somehow, by trickery or at the point of a gun, he got Estey into the car and made him drive down by the waterfront."

He paused, not wanting to speak of details. "When it was over, he left the gun and took Estey's, so the only obvious conclusion would be the one the police accepted."

She had been watching him, wide-eyed and intent; now she leaned back, with a small sigh. "Yes," she breathed. "It must have been that way. Ralph never could have done a thing like that and"—she paused and her glance met his—"you're going to try to prove it?"

Standish said he had to try. For another second or two he eyed her with approval; then all at once he was embarrassed, because he knew he had no right to look at her like that.

He signaled the waiter and paid the check. He was still a little embarrassed when he shook hands with her in the foyer and heard her expression of gratitude.

It had been cloudy earlier in the evening, and by ignoring the threat of rain Paul Standish found himself caught without a coat as he stepped out on a sidewalk that was slick and black and wet. His car was parked nearly a block away, and though it was not raining hard it rained steadily and there was nothing to do but run for it.

He piled into the car and slammed the door, found the seat wet from an open window and rolled the window up. He dug his keys out of his pocket, got the windshield wiper working, finally jockeyed his way clear of the parking space. It took him eight minutes to drive to the row of garages in an alley a block or so from his apartment, and when he had locked up he felt his way through the darkness to the street.

He turned right here, turned at the corner, hugging the walls of he building to keep the rain off. His own place was two-thirds of the way down the block, and he walked along, bag in hand, as the shadows thickened. There were few windows lighted here and no sound, except, somewhere up ahead, the low, pushing throb of an idling motor.

Standish never knew what made him glance up, what made him stop so unaccountably just before he reached the glass doors of the apartment house. He was hurrying. His chin was tucked down against the rain. The sound of the motor meant nothing. Yet something, some inner compulsion, made him look up and stop short.

Opposite the entrance and diagonally twenty-five feet away stood this

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small coupé with the idling motor, the right-hand window rolled down and framing darkly a shadowed figure. Standish could not see it clearly. He was aware of a turned-up collar, a snap-brim felt hat hiding a half-seen face, the combined impression vague, because what caught his eye was the metallic glint of a gun.

All this took but a fraction of a second. As he stiffened, the gun hammered, and he saw the muzzle flash and felt the lash of chips from the brick wall ahead and above him. Then he was down, half diving, sprawling flat in the angle of the building and pulling his head behind his doctor's bag while the gun roared twice again in succession.

Taut-muscled and immobile, he shrank there until he heard the motor accelerate, heard the whine of gears. He peered out cautiously as the coupé whipped into the street with lights out and licence obscured.

He did not bother to look about him then, because he heard windows going up along the street as the curious sought answers for the shots. Ducking quickly into the entrance, he rode to his fourth-floor apartment, conscious now of the tremor in his legs as reaction began its work.

Inside, he put aside his bag and saw that his clothes were wetly stained but not torn. The palms of his trembling hands were black, and he went into the kitchen to wash them.

He was not sure when the trembling stopped. He made himself a quick drink, and as he carried it back to the living room he discovered he was whistling softly. This so amazed him that he wondered why, and then he knew, and found the answer oddly satisfying. Someone was badly scared.

Paul Standish called Lieutenant Ballard from his apartment the next morning because he did not want Mary to know about last night's murder attempt, and it was a glum and noncommittal Ballard who listened to the story and examined the three scars in the apartment-house front, the worthless fragment or two from the bullets.

A calmer appraisal of Ballard's attitude should have told Standish that Ballard was troubled by what had happened, that his glumness arose from his inability to explain the incident, that he was all too aware that it was no longer possible to brush aside the doctor's theory.

When he neglected to say so, Standish needled him. "This one you can't hang on young Estey."

Ballard eyed him fretfully. "Okay; so who do we hang it on?"

Standish shrugged. "I told you what I thought in your office the other day."

"I remember. You had the idea somebody hired Fleming to run down Walter Tremaine, and because Fleming got greedy this somebody fed him chloral hydrate and then shot him. Does that mean you think either the widow, the brother, or this

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broker guy, Choate, killed both Fleming and Estey and took some shots at you?"

"That's exactly what I mean. And what I want to know now is: Are you going to follow it up?"

"Sure," Ballard said, "Sure, Doc, I'd like to talk it over with the D.A. first, but—sure, we'll get right after it."

But for all his words there was no enthusiasm in Ballard's manner as he turned away, and Standish was still annoyed with his friend when he went back upstairs, to find the telephone ringing. The voice that answered his hello belonged to Lee Cheney.

"I don't know if this is important," the little detective said, "but Donald Tremaine stopped in the Air Terminal on his way to work this morning. He wanted to know about flight times to Miami. He didn't buy tickets."

Standish considered this with interest, and a thoughtful smile touched the corners of his eyes. "Did he *go* to work?"

"Sure."

"Have you got some keys that might get me into his flat?"

"Yeah," Cheney said, with some hesitation. "But don't expect me to go with you. You'll be sticking your neck all the way out to here."

"I know," Standish said. "You don't have to go. Just bring the keys right over, will you?"

With the help of Cheney's keys Standish had no trouble getting into Tremaine's apartment, and the first thing he glanced at was the mantelpiece where the perfume atomizer had stood. He found it presently in the bathroom medicine cabinet, but first he looked over the neat, well-furnished living room, the equally neat bedroom with its maple twin beds, one of which had not been made.

In coming here he had no particular goal in mind; he did not know exactly what he was looking for. He was, in fact, just looking in the hope that he could find something that would help substantiate the pattern he had in mind, and until he reached the bathroom his search was singularly unproductive.

Here there was a double-size cabinet with two doors. The one on the right was cram-jammed with a man's toilet articles, medicines, prescriptions; the left-hand one had been devoted to feminine use.

The atomizer was there; so were a lot of bottles, jars, and tubes of beauty aids and preparations. Standish eyed them all with new interest and satisfaction as he recalled his visit to Donald Tremaine, the quiet, neat, and self-effacing man who, according to reports, had no girl friends.

Closing his mind to further speculation. Standish stepped back and looked about the room, inspecting the towels, shower curtain, bath mat. There was a wicker receptacle in one corner, and he glanced at it only as a matter of course until he noticed a

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strand of black hair which had become tangled in the woven surface. On closer inspection he found an even longer strand, and now he took an envelope from his bag, carefully untangled the hairs, and deposited them inside.

Then, on impulse, he emptied a zipper case he carried in the bag, found a pair of forceps, and lifted each and every article from the left-hand cabinet and put them in the case. This done, he left the apartment just as fast as he could.

Still with no blueprinted plan in mind, but working on the theory that the more information he had—regardless of how inconsequential it seemed—the better, he drove first to the morgue and went up to the city chemist's laboratory on the second floor, a large room of benches, tables, and cabinets cluttered with tools of the trade. The chemist, a short, balding man with glasses, listened to Standish, accepted the envelope with the two hairs, and said he'd see what he could do.

"I'll phone you this afternoon," Standish said, and then went back to his car and drove to Police Headquarters, where he located a friend of his in the crime laboratory.

"See if you can find any prints, Eddie," he said, and dumped the contents of the zipper case on a workbench. "There should be something here you can use."

"What do I do if I get a couple of good ones?" Eddie asked.

"I don't know. I'll call you."

Until nearly four o'clock Paul Standish was busy with the practice of medicine. When the last office patient had been administered to, he told Mary to lock the outer door, and then picked up the telephone.

The city chemist had information and Standish said, "Yes . . . Yeah." Then, with a quickened cadence, "Dyed? Full length. Good. Just hang onto it—and thanks."

When the connection was broken he dialed another number and had words with Eddie in the crime laboratory.

"What luck?"

"A nice neat thumb—left hand—and a right index," Eddie said. "So what comes now?"

Standish took his time answering, phrased his reply with deliberation. Mary came back into the room as he finished, but when she made no comment he dialed once more and found Lee Cheney at his office.

"Have you still got a man on Donald Tremaine?"

"No," Cheney said.

"Put one on his apartment. Call everything else off before my bill gets too big, Lee, but I want the apartment watched. If our brunette shows up, have your man phone me at once. I'll be here waiting."

"For how long? What makes you think she'll show at all?"

"Because," Standish said, "I think time is running out. If I'm wrong, if she doesn't come before midnight, have your man call me anyway."

Mary had been listening as she

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straightened up the surgery, and now she sat down at her desk. "I take it," she said with some asperity, "that you've stopped being a doctor until midnight. Suppose someone calls?"

"You'll answer the phone," Standish said. "Refer any calls to Dr. Young, just as you do when I'm out of town."

Mary sighed her exasperation. She powdered her nose, slammed a couple of drawers, finally sat back, her color high and sparks in her brown eyes. "What're you going to do if the brunette does come?"

"Pay her a little call." Standish roused himself and glanced at his watch. "It's after five," he said. "Why don't you run along?"

"How will you eat?"

"You could get me a sandwich and coffee before you leave."

She said nothing to this for a while. She answered the telephone and referred a patient to Dr. Young. Twenty minutes later she rose and went into the dressing room. When she had changed she left the office without a word. While she was gone the telephone shrilled again, but this time it was not a patient but Eddie, at Headquarters, with an additional report.

When Mary came back she carried three brown-paper bags. From the first she produced two sandwiches which she put on Standish's desk; from the second she took two large cartons of coffee; from the third came two fresh pears and a bunch of seedless grapes.

Standish examined the food. He looked at Mary and when he smiled much of his tiredness went away. "So," he said, "you won't go home."

"No."

Standish eyed her fondly. "Let's eat," he said. "I'm hungry."

"Me, too," Mary said. "I hope you like grapes."

And so they ate and made the coffee last as long as they could and smoked cigarettes and turned on the office radio. They said very little and both seemed conscious of the desk clock, which crept with discouraging slowness to 8:00, to 8:30, to 9:00. Finally, with an explosion of sound that startled them both, the telephone rang.

The doctor did not recognize the voice which came to him, but the message was clear. "Stay there!" Standish said. "I'm on my way."

The man came from the shadows diagonally across the street as Standish parked his car a hundred feet beyond the brownstone where Donald Tremaine lived. He said the brunette was still up there and did Standish need any further help. Standish said no, and when the man moved off he turned to Mary.

"If you want to do something you might phone Ballard. There's a drug store back on the corner." He slid from behind the wheel. "Tell him where I am, and when he gets here he can wait, or he can come up, whichever he likes."

Mary did not like it; her voice said so. "And what will you be doing?"

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Standish was not quite sure as he moved off in the darkness without bothering to reply. He had an idea that he could get more information out of Tremaine than Ballard could officially, and having come this far practically alone, he had to try. He told himself this as he stood on the second-floor landing and knocked at Tremaine's door, then knocked again, while the tension began to build slowly inside him.

It was a good ten seconds before there was a reply, and then a man's voice said, "Yes? Who is it?"

"Dr. Standish."

Another ten seconds went by. Finally a lock clicked and the door opened about a foot, framing Tremaine's bespectacled face. "I'm sorry, Doctor," he said in his formal way. "I have company."

"I know. That's what I want to talk to you about."

And then Standish made his move putting his weight against the door, swiftly and with precision before Tremaine realized what was happening, forcing the smaller man back, then pushing on into an empty room.

He heard the door slam behind him as he continued on, and then, suddenly, Tremaine had darted ahead of him. What happened then was not in the doctor's script. For while the man who confronted him was still impeccably groomed, the jaw was hard and the mouth was white with rage.

"You can't come in here like this," he yelled. "Not even the police can come in here without a warrant."

And then, having spoken, he swung. It was not an artful blow, but it was unexpected and he gave it all he had. Standish saw it coming and had time to jerk his head, not quite enough, but enough to vitiate its force.

As it was, the punch grazed his cheekbone and he went back a step, and Tremaine was after him, swinging the left. The trouble was, Standish had done some boxing in college and Tremaine apparently had not, and now the left was neatly slipped and Standish was inside, trapping the arm and shifting his weight.

He did not strike Tremaine; he merely spun him off his feet and dumped him against the edge of the divan, from which he bounced to the floor.

It was Tremaine's eyes which gave the show away; for even as he sat there they darted beyond Standish, so that the doctor had time to wheel, to spot the fleeing woman before she reached the door. She had come from the inner hallway, dressed in black, a tall brunette with dark glasses, and as Standish leaped after her she was tugging at the door and getting it open and driving through.

He caught her arm as she reached the hall and yanked her back, slamming the door with his free hand. For a second she pitted her strength against his, and then she clawed at

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him and swung her handbag, which hit his shoulder hard and bounced into a chair.

Then Standish reached for that black hair, and it came free in his grasp, tangling with the dark glasses, so that they came free, too. What he saw then was not brunette. This woman was blonde with blazing green eyes and a white twisted face.

It was Sylvia Keith.

Standish stepped back, breathing hard, but feeling no surprise. He recovered the black wig and the glasses, put them into his pocket. He watched the girl straighten her features and then her dress. She was still breathing spasmodically, and her red mouth was a tight, hard line.

All this took perhaps five seconds and during that time no one said a word. Then Tremaine jumped up and gave vent to his feelings. He said he'd have Standish arrested; he'd have his license revoked. He said a lot of other things and Standish heard him out.

"If I were you," Standish said when it was all over, "I'd do some listening."

"I'll call the police," Tremaine said, and when Standish said he wished he would, Tremaine started for the telephone. He took two steps before Sylvia Keith's voice stopped him.

"Wait a minute, Don!" The voice was clipped, venomous. "Let him talk."

Tremaine hesitated, wavered, obeyed. Standish glanced again at Sylvia, and only when he remembered that she had once been an actress of sorts could he accept the fact that this hard-eyed, ruthless woman and the girl he had tried to help and had talked to only the night before were one and the same.

He sat down and looked at Tremaine. "I guess you're in love with her."

"Certainly I'm in love with her."

"Since before your brother was killed. . . . Then why didn't you marry her? Because your brother, who apparently dominated you the same way your father did, might make trouble?"

The rage in Tremaine had passed. What anger remained was now under control, and his resentment showed only in the overtones of his accented voice. "What business is it of yours?"

"Only this," Standish said. "Unless you've got a very good story to tell the police you'll probably face murder charges; at the least, you'll wind up as an accessory."

Tremaine leaned forward, jaw slack and widely staring. Before he could speak, Standish continued, his voice quiet, assured, intent. He reminded Tremaine of their previous talk and the doubt he had expressed about Walter Tremaine's accidental death. He outlined the theory again, adding that it was no longer theory but a fact.

Then, quickly, he said, "You got a check for five thousand dollars from Warren Choate in June."

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"He sold some stock for me."

"That check was not deposited; it was cashed . . . What did you do with it?" He pressed when Tremaine did not reply. "Who did you give it to?"

"Why"—Tremaine's glance shifted behind the spectacles, came back—"to Sylvia."

"In cash?"

"She wanted cash."

"Why?"

"To pay off a mortgage on her mother's home. She supported her mother—out in Ohio. She said she couldn't marry me with that mortgage over her head."

Standish let his breath out slowly. Something about the other's manner, his almost naïve sincerity, told him that this must be the truth.

"A mortgage?" he said. "Well, that we can check. Now, let me tell you what I think she did with that five thousand. She gave it to George Fleming," he said, and went on hurriedly to tell what he had learned from Ballard and Lee Cheney about the man. "Fleming was for hire if the price was right and the risk reasonable and"—he nodded toward the girl—"she knew it."

He said, "She wouldn't marry you while your brother was alive, would she? What did she tell you? That she wanted to wait until you were thirty-five and you received your inheritance and were your own man for a change? Whatever her excuse, she found out from you that your brother had an insurance policy which paid double in case of accidental death. And she could add. A man with two hundred thousand was better for her than a man with fifty.

"For all I know she may have planned to have Mrs. Tremaine killed at the same time her husband was; that would net you about double the two hundred thousand. If she did, Fleming missed the woman, and anyway it doesn't matter now."

Tremaine wet his lips. He shook his head, his eyes incredulous. "You are saying that Sylvia hired Fleming to kill my brother?" he asked in hushed tones.

"That's exactly what I'm saying. She paid Fleming your five thousand and Fleming did the job. My testimony about your brother's drunken condition helped get Fleming off. The trouble was, Fleming fell for Sylvia too, and when she gave him no time he got suspicious. In the beginning I think she convinced him that she was acting for somebody else. Later, when his money began to run out, I think he may have followed her here one Monday night.

"After that he knew why she wanted your brother killed accidentally. She was going to collect when she married you after your thirty-fifth birthday, and Fleming was on a spot to do some collecting himself. When he told her so, she knew she had to kill him or he'd bleed her to death."

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He stopped abruptly, held by some new change in Tremaine. Tremaine's gaze had shifted and his bespectacled eyes had a funny expression. He said, *"No, Sylvia!"* and there was something in the cadence of that voice that made the hairs stir on the back of Standish's neck.

He turned slowly. He looked at Sylvia Keith. Then he saw the open handbag, the automatic pointed right at him. The sight of it jolted him and he forced his glance up while he swallowed and disciplined his mind.

"That's Estey's gun, isn't it? You had to take it after you'd shot him with the gun you used on Fleming." He paused as a new thought came to him. "Estey had a permit to carry a gun and the number is on that permit. The police will be glad to get that gun. What did you do with it that first night when you knew you'd be picked up?"

"Checked it in a locker at the bus terminal."

"And went back and got it the next day. I guess you kept it handy, just in case. You had it close last night, didn't you?"

He turned back to Tremaine, not waiting for a reply. He told what had happened. "It had only been raining a short time," he said, "and when that coupé pulled away I noticed the pavement was wet and shiny where it had stood opposite the entrance. If it had been parked there long, if someone had been waiting for me, a part of that pavement would have been dry. Last night I thought someone—I was thinking of you at the time—had followed me home."

Nothing had changed in Tremaine's face and Standish turned back to the girl.

"You knew who I suspected when I told you about the five thousand dollars," he said. "You knew if I questioned him"—he indicated Tremaine—"the truth would come out, and then there would be no marriage for you and no two hundred thousand. No matter what you had to stop me, and you tried.

He fashioned a mirthless smile but his glance was watchful. "The minute I left the club you grabbed a customer's hat and coat and your bag—or was the gun in the car?—gave your assistant some excuse and said you'd be back in a few minutes. You didn't have to follow me. You were the only one who knew where I garaged the car. All you had to do was wait out front of the apartment. With that hat and coat on I thought it was a man."

She made no comment to all this. Nothing changed in her face. The gun remained steady.

Standish swallowed again, feeling the perspiration start and the dampness growing in his palms. He looked at Tremaine. He said, "Do you want to hear the rest of it?" but the other continued to stare at the girl with shocked and unbelieving eyes.

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"She thought she had to kill Fleming." Standish raised his voice but still Tremaine would not look at him. "She had to do it so she wouldn't be suspected, and she was as clever there as she was in planning that accident. There happened to be a young lad named Estey who had been mooning around her, and all he needed was a little encouragement and his infatuation was complete. She knew Fleming, knew what would happen. It wasn't hard to arrange that fight before witnesses, to suggest that Estey ought to carry a gun to protect himself—and her."

He said, "She went to Fleming's place with a paper of chloral hydrate. They had a drink together and she gave him the drug, and when it started to work she cleaned up, so there would be no trace of those drinks. She didn't forget the paper that contained the drug, either; she just happened to miss the wastebasket with it and I happened to get curious about it."

Sylvia cleared her throat. "You're crazy, Doc," she said. "Why would I bother with chloral hydrate if I was going to shoot him?"

"My guess is that you weren't very handy with a gun. You missed me three times last night from twenty-five feet. You didn't want to walk in on Fleming and start shooting, because you didn't know how many bullets it would take. Plenty of men have lived with four or five slugs in them and you had to be sure. You wanted him quiet so you could do the job with one shot."

He realized he was wiping his palms on his coat, and stopped. "Afterward you went to Estey—or had you already made the date?—and suggested a ride in his car. Down by the waterfront where it was dark and quiet. A shot at close range was easy then, and when you'd taken that gun and left yours behind for the police you had a perfect solution for Fleming's murder that would never involve you."

He turned back and found Tremaine had not moved. He rose slowly and went over to the sofa, not looking at the gun. He moved a pillow so he could sit on the arm and then touched Tremaine on the shoulder. "Did you hear that?"

"I heard it." Tremaine blinked and seemed to shake himself.

"The police are going to want some explanation. You knew Fleming had been murdered. You knew Sylvia was being questioned, that she was involved with the most likely suspect." Standish paused, and a sudden impatience struck at him. "You discover the girl you love knows the man who ran down your brother. Weren't you suspicious? What did you think it was—coincidence?"

"She told me about that." Tremaine leaned forward, clasped hands between his knees. "I went away for a while after my brother's death. When I came back Sylvia said Fleming had been bothering her. He

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wanted to take her out, give her presents. He was jealous if she spoke to another man. She was afraid of him and what he might do, and she wouldn't let me go to the police because she said I mustn't be involved.

"That's why she started coming here in a wig and dark glasses. She said it would only be until October and then we could get married quietly and go somewhere else to live."

He sighed and said, "I tried to argue with her, but she told me about this young fellow who thought he was in love with her. She said she wasn't encouraging him, but that she was afraid there might be trouble between him and Fleming. She said it was her problem and that she'd handle it some way without involving me. She said our love had to be a secret until we were married."

His voice trailed off and he inspected his clasped hands. The room was suddenly quiet, and as Standish tried to understand what Tremaine had said, the explanation came to him, slowly at first and then with a mounting conviction. The answer, it seemed, lay in the character of Tremaine, in the girl's physical appeal which few men could ignore.

Standish did not stop to analyze that appeal now; but he recalled how he, as a man, had responded to it. He knew that Fleming, who by background and experience should know much about such women, had succumbed to her allure. So had Estey, believing her lies and trusting her implicitly. How then could Tremaine, with his quiet, unassertive ways and lack of experience, hope to deny her, once she, with her cleverness, had made up her mind to trap him.

So Tremaine had believed her, too, and was no doubt grateful for his seeming good fortune. With Sylvia in his arms it would be easy for him to let her make decisions, to promise her everything she desired, to wait however long she asked in the hope that one day she would be his.

There had always been women like this, and men who danced attendance; but even as Standish understood how it must have been with Tremaine, he found the thought sickening and distasteful.

"All right," he said. "I guess that's it. Maybe the police—"

The girl cut him off. "Listen, Donald," she said in a voice that made Standish glance around. "He can't prove any of it. Once we get rid of this gun he hasn't a thing."

She hesitated, no longer the hard-eyed girl who had clawed at Standish and defied him in harsh, vindictive phrases; this was the girl he had known before, smiling—all but the eyes—confident that she could recapture her perfidious influence.

"You can help, Donald," she said with quiet persuasiveness. "We'll get out of here right now. We'll take the doctor with us. We can decide about him later, but we must be sure no one ever finds the gun. Please. You

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must believe me, Donald. There isn't any other proof."

Tremaine came slowly to his feet and Standish misunderstood his reaction. "Don't be a fool!" he said.

Tremaine did not seem to hear. He had eyes only for the girl, and when he had straightened, his chin came up and he seemed to stretch still taller, his face gray and traces of shock beginning to show through.

"I'll take that gun!" he said in a voice Standish had never heard. "We're not going anywhere."

"Donald!"

The word was sharply reproachful, and when he took a forward step she came quickly out of her chair.

"Give it to me, Sylvia."

"No!" She stiffened, and the gun, which had been pointed at Standish, shifted to Tremaine. She watched him take another slow step, and now her eyes took on a dangerous glint. "No, you fool!"

And suddenly the tension that had been working on Standish wound tightly inside him and he caught his breath. The girl would never surrender the gun.

She said as much in the next instant. She tried to back up, and the chair got in her way. She seemed to brace herself. Half screaming at Tremaine now, threatening him because she seemed aware, as Standish was, that Tremaine had no intention of stopping.

"I'll kill you both," she screamed. "No one will know. The only one who could hurt me is Fleming, and he's dead."

"You murdered my brother," Tremaine said in a voice that was horrible to hear. "You murdered Fleming and Estey. You tried to kill Standish."

He hesitated, seemed to get his balance for the next step. Standish knew he was going to take it, just as he knew the reason was not courage, as such, but shock. Until now Tremaine had thought this girl could do no wrong. Now his world was shattered. He had paid for the murder of his own brother. It was as if his only salvation, his only hope of self-respect, lay in cleansing himself of all complicity.

Tremaine took the step, and Standish saw the finger tighten on the gun, recognized the brutal resolution which filmed the girl's mad gaze. He cried out a warning that no one heard, and then, because there was nothing else he could do, he reached surreptitiously for the pillow beside him.

He threw it as he came to his feet, sailing it at the gun, watching it spin with what seemed like agonizing slowness past Tremaine's shoulder.

It was not much of a weapon, that pillow, but it served a purpose. It distracted the girl just long enough. She saw it coming and did not know whether to duck or to shoot, and then Standish was moving, hearing the shot a split instant before the pillow hit the gun.

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Tremaine stopped where he was. The automatic fell and skidded across the floor, and now the panic struck at the girl and she wheeled and ran, forgetting the gun in her haste to get out. Somehow she had the door open before Standish got close, and then she was gone.

Standish made no attempt to follow her. He went over to the gun, picked it up gingerly. He looked at Tremaine, and now the other was staring curiously at the thin bluish mark on the heel of one hand where the bullet had grazed him. It was only a nick and there was just a trace of blood.

"She—would have killed me," he said in a shaky voice, "if it hadn't been for you."

Although he was emotionally shaken and none too steady, Standish sought to reassure Tremaine, but before he could speak he heard the commotion in the hall. When he stepped through the open door he saw Lieutenant Ballard half carrying, half dragging the struggling girl up the stairs. Close behind came Mary Hayward.

Sylvia was still struggling when Ballard got her inside the room and motioned Standish to close the door. She mouthed frenzied words that had no meaning, her dress was up above her knees, and the front was torn. In desperation Ballard shook her, stood her on her feet, and shook her again. Then, suddenly, she was in a limp heap on the floor, and Ballard was lifting her and carrying her to the sofa.

Ballard's neck was red and his face was grim and sweaty. He blew out his breath and said, "Okay, start being a doctor."

Standish nodded to Mary, who stood silently by the door. She understood that he wanted the bag in his car and left the room at once. Standish looked again at Tremaine. The shock still showed in the ashen face, the hollow, sightless eyes. Tremaine had aged five years in the last hour, and as a medical man Standish was more worried about him than he was about the girl . . .

It was after midnight before matters were in hand and statements taken. Finally there were only Standish and Mary left in Ballard's office as the lieutenant went over and closed the door. He found a half-filled bottle of whiskey in a lower drawer and brought out paper cups.

"This," he said happily, "is strictly against regulations." He poured a spot of whiskey in each cup, added water from the cooler. "No ice," he said, and then sat down, saluted with his cup, and drank gratefully. "Well," he said, "you were right again, Doc."

"So were you."

"Hunh?"

"About the chloral hydrate." Standish smiled. "That first morning you said if anyone had fed it to Fleming it was the girl. And she did."

"Yeah. That's right, I did." Ballard chuckled at the memory, and

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then said, "When did you really tumble it was her?"

"Not till this afternoon," Standish said. "I thought Donald Tremaine might have been behind it, since he stood to gain the most. A couple of long black hairs ruined that premise."

He explained how he had found them and what the city chemist had done. "He found out they were dyed," he said.

"So?"

"Dyed all the way. From tip to tip." Standish sampled his drink and it tasted good. "If they had come from someone's head the color would have been different at the root. They suggested a wig."

Ballard nodded. "Yeah," he said. "And a brunette like Mrs. Tremaine would hardly be wearing a brunette wig."

"The toilet articles clinched it. Eddie found a couple of prints. You fingerprinted Sylvia Keith that first night in hopes you'd get a 'make' with what you found in Fleming's apartment. You didn't then, but Eddie did today."

Standish gestured with his cup. "Sylvia was Donald's secret love. She came to him every Monday night—the night the club was closed, though I never thought of that—and she was involved in Fleming's murder, and Fleming had killed Donald's brother." He shrugged. "It was just too much to be coincidental."

He said, "It seemed to me that Donald was the weak one. I thought if I confronted him with what I had I'd get the true story of that five thousand dollars he handed out. I never figured on her having the gun."

Mary sighed heavily. "She must have been insane."

"Not legally," Standish said. "A thorough psychiatric examination will tell, but as a guess I'd say her trouble was environmental rather than psychotic."

Ballard put his cup down. "She would have gotten away with it if you hadn't found that little powder paper she discarded and then tested for chloral hydrate in the p.m." He grinned, his eyes respectful.

"You're like Old Doc Lathrop," he said. "You got curious and you didn't care what anybody said, or if it was your business or not; you couldn't let go until you had the truth. I guess that was it, hunh?"

"Maybe something like that," Paul said, but even as he spoke he remembered Sylvia's strange appeal, and it came to him that, given a different set of circumstances, he might have been no more able to resist it than Donald Tremaine.

It was not a flattering thought, or an easy one to dismiss. He saw that Mary stood beside him and as he said good night to Ballard he took her arm. It felt firm and warm under his hand, and as she smiled up at him he knew that here, at least, was something real, something honest, something good.

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John Pierce is that rara avis among writers—an "original." He thinks his individual way, plots his distinct and different way, and most particular of all, he writes in his own style, a singular and distinguished style. In a phrase not too often applicable these days—sui generis . . .

A CHILD'S GARDEN OF PROFITS

by JOHN PIERCE

FUNNY SHE HAD BEEN BUSY LOATHing him even at the moment he must have died. Dressing herself while Ralph showered, she had upset her bag and the gift from her husband tumbled out. It was a leather-bound edition of Mildred Cramm's novel, *Forever,* a treatise on eternal love. It lay open on the rug by the bed. The mere inscription—*for Blanche, with undying love, Vernon*—revolted her, and doubtless would have even if she knew at that time what had happened to him.

"Revolts you why?" Ralph asked, toweling himself into the room. He was pale and thin as a chicken, but wanly handsome, with a glandular basso voice. He had been a disc jockey and then ridden unemployment, but could not get his teeth into either; he now wanted to be an actor.

"Because he's so *stupid,*" she answered. All the rebuffs, all the humiliation, but Vernon had never given up. "*Forever* belongs to another time of my life, another man, and he *knows* that. It's as if he were trying to capitalize on my nostalgia for someone else, don't you see?"

"See," replied Ralph.

At Ralph's wall mirror she fixed her face. *Worse* luck that Vernon should have misdirected all that stupidity at her, saving none for his financial doodle-doo. So near she'd been, so jinglingly near to slapping him with divorce papers, and then he, in one of those goitrous confidences ancillary to love, had confessed this: three-quarters of his income as a contractor wouldn't have borne five minutes audit by a chimpanzee, and so he had been hiding it away. Scuttling her, ruining her plans for Ralph. How sue for money that one's husband didn't legally have? "God, I'm furious," she announced at this recollection, hurling her lipstick aside.

"You needn't be," Ralph said, turning on the Hawaiian music she liked.

"Oh, you." *He* could shrug as he tied *her* Countess Mara necktie. *He* had mastered the knack of living off saps like her. If not her, he'd find another in the first flossy cock-

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tail lounge, and if he did that to her she was through.

Said Ralph, looking vaguely paralytic as his eyes climbed out of cigarette smoke: "Everywhere I go, as I trudge down life's path, people push through the crowds to ask my advice. 'Tell us your secret, Mister.' So I tell them. I'm not above sharing. 'Recipro-cerebration,' I say."

"Which is what?"

"It's something like sonar, except it isn't. It means climbing into the mind of your adversary and, through his eyes, imagining yourself as he'd like you to be. That determined, you leap back and quickly arrange yourself according to his most cherished desires."

"Listen, Dale Carnegie, all I want out of him is to know where that quarter of a million is stuck away."

"And so you shall. But you must be, for the time, just what he wants you to be. He's admitted to you he's a crook—a monumental blunder. How easy to separate him from the rest."

"I suppose so," she signed reluctantly. "I'd better buy *him* a gift." She rolled her lips for the mirror, wondering what gift to buy, but then saw Ralph hula-hulaing to the Hawaiian music and got giggling, and together they collapsed on his bed.

No gift was necessary. A police car was in her driveway when she woke up. There had been an accident on Lake Katchetan, 50 miles to the north. Vernon Cobb's cabin cruiser had exploded two miles offshore—exploded, caught fire, and gone down in 170 feet of ice water. Arthur Pettingill, his oldest friend and constant fishing companion, had straddled some planking and made it to safety, but only after relinquishing all hope for Vernon, who'd been trapped in the galley and gone down with the craft. Pettingill lay incoherent in a clinic there.

Blanche fainted convincingly, was given a sedative, and did not wake again until past midnight when Ralph telephoned her, a little high. He had just "caught" the news in the late paper. "Who is Pettingill?" he asked.

"His old college roommate, twenty years ago," Blanche said. "He's still in shock. I wish I were. All I can think of is suicide."

"The money, you mean."

"Of course the money, and I'm frantic. They say, where he is, they might never find him, and all those damned Enoch Arden laws. Figuring mortgages and loans and debts and so on, God knows what there's left."

"I'll be right over," Ralph said.

"Darling, don't you *dare,*" she shrieked, horrified.

"We ought to get started looking."

"Ralph, dearest, he's not even through *bubbling* yet, and any minute I'll have his relatives and everyone coming in."

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A glum silence followed. "It's your life," he said.

"But Ralph," she remonstrated. No use: he'd hung up. She cradled the phone and rolled over and began to laugh. He'd pout a while and eat half a jar of olives and go to bed. Poor dear Ralph. She loved him to exhaustion, but the poor thing couldn't even support himself. She wanted to finance his acting career; for that they'd have to have the missing money. It would take a lot of looking by both of them and she hadn't the dimmest idea.

Calmly now, where? Where even to begin looking? Only one thing was certain: Vernon was far too cagey to have left it anywhere on the grounds. What she sought, then, was some local direction-pointer, but in his study there were 3000 books and two filing cabinets and in the basement just as much more. To go through these effects piece by piece looking for *what?* It was too maddening; she'd need Ralph's prehensile, intuitive kind of mind. Recipro-cerebration. She fell asleep . . .

With Vernon's weeping mother and older sister she journeyed north to the lake the next day. In a motel they awaited news from the various search operations—the divers, the helicopters over the dozens of islands around where he'd gone down.

They waited a week before hope was abandoned. Then they drove back and convened for a memorial service held at Vernon's church. Blanche, veiled in black, wished the old lady would stop sniveling. Wanting Ralph only, she agonized through the organ's brool—two of Vernon's favorite hymns they'd got somewhere—then the leaden voice of the minister who read from Luke. An odd sort of message, she would recall later: ". . . *that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, more than over ninety and nine just persons, which need no repentance.*" She could not see what it had to do with anything.

But it was over and they were gone—the relatives and friends and the curious, leaving the bank representative with words sadder than anything that wall-eyed minister had produced. He suggested she "consider the possibilities" of "perhaps giving thought" to "the pros and cons" of employment. He submitted that she debate getting rid of the house and the mountain cabin and finding a less expensive place to live. She closed the door on his sleek brief case.

Em*ploy*ment. She'd rather hang. She mixed a drink, sank into the sofa. Where?

Recipro-cerebration. She used her fingers. If I were Vernon (index finger) and I loved me (thumb) which he did, would I not make some provision for me (thumb) to have access to the stolen money (middle finger) in the event of

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some sudden and unexpected demise? Of course I would. What else could she go on?

But it was hopeless. She had plundered his bedroom and workshop and was waist-deep in papers dredged from a filing cabinet in his study before Ralph arrived, bringing his electric toothbrush and a withered rose that he had plucked outside. "It's impossible," she despaired. "It'll take a year just to read this stuff, much less find something I don't even know I'm looking for."

"Recipro-cerebration," reminded Ralph, mixing a drink of Vernon's expensive Scotch. "We explore, first, the deceased's mind."

"I've tried to."

"But not very successfully," indicating the floor's litter. "You estimate what, a quarter of a million dollars of illicit cash hidden away?"

"That's what he said. Kickbacks from the city and subcontractors."

"Ergo, it's highly vulnerable money if these peculations should ever come to light, and do you still expect him to have written out on paper soething that says, 'Look in well bottom?' or 'Dig four paces west of old elm?' "

"I don't know."

"Yes, but *he* did. Assuming he wanted you and you only to have this money, he must leave such word that, added to what you know, would have meaning to you *but to no one else.* He is, let us say, trusting to your ingenuity."

"Not one milligram of which he ever gave me credit for."

"Explain."

"I mean, if I thought *he* was stupid, you should have seen what *he* thought of *me*. In that repulsive fatherly way of his he treated me like an under-age moron. Which isn't to say I didn't encourage it. Some men need that for their own egos, and how else could I have ever gotten away with the stuff I've pulled?"

"This requires profound thought," Ralph said, pouring another drink. "Generally speaking, how stupid would you say he thought you were? Would he, for example, give you directions to the City Auditorium or Highway 35X South with any confidence that you'd get there without getting lost?"

"Of course not. He'd lead me in his convertible, or navigate from his side of my car, telling me every turn to take."

"Take you there step by step, so to speak."

"Like a control tower bringing in an airliner."

"An interesting analogy," said Ralph. He stood up to pace the floor. She must speak to him about his posture; he walked with a noticeable stoop, his head bent forward as if forever tracking a spoor. He said, "On page 493, Volume 4 of my memory book is this friend of a friend who died of some odious malfunction or other. The week

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following, the man's widow got a tape mailed by a lawyer. On that tape the deceased had spelled out with great care all matters of finance, insurance, pension, child education, vitamin pills, where to get the best trade-in on the car, what to feed the tropical fish, et cetera, et cetera, and a lugubrious adieu. To commit all that to paper so that she could understand it would have taken him a year."

"I've been in touch with his lawyers and his office," she said. "He left no messages in any form. There wasn't even a will."

"You miss the point. 'She is my darling love, but charmingly stupid,' thinks Vernon Cobb. 'I must speak to her fatherly-gently through her grief.' Speak how? You've said he was never without a recording machine somewhere at hand for his memos and dictation and so forth. Where is all that stuff kept?"

"What a genius you are, Ralph!" she said.

And he *was*. Who else but Ralph could have kept her brains from granulating under that week-long tedium of seven-inch tapes droning board meetings, speech rehearsals for the Contracting Engineers Society, memos to Miss Hazlitt, letters to Durgan in Seattle, specifications for the Hotchkiss urban renewal, *ad* insanity. To these voices Ralph strode the floor, waved his arms, stretched his face about, and worked his mouth in comic synchronization. He was, as always, a laugh riot, but failure was making its inroads, and the week had garnered nothing but liquor and fancy-food bills totaling $137; she was not sure there was that much left in the bank. Stupefied by the singsong of that departed voice, tired and irritable, she left him to go to bed. "It's *my* money," she snapped. "I'll look for it when I damn please."

That night she reached for him, found nothing, and came up shock-still in the silence. He had not come to bed. She said his name and reached about for her robe, afraid, really, to go and look. He had this cruel way of punishing her for her fits of pique, walking out as if never to return, and in this house, grown oppressive with its relics of the dead man, she could not have borne being alone. Had he left her for good? No, he *wouldn't* have; this was more money than he'd see in his lifetime.

Barefoot she left the room, then stopped again, paralyzed. Suppose he—*suppose he had found what they sought and gone for it on his own!* In panic she ran down the hall, then, at Vernon's room, fell weakly against the doorsill. Ralph stood there before a full-length mirror, trying on Vernon's clothes—a dinner jacket, an alpine hat. "Have you no respect for the dead?" she shouted, but met his sad eyes and in that drollery convulsed with laughter and fell with him to the floor.

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He found it the next morning. She was starting his breakfast steak in the kitchen, still chiding herself for her mean suspicion, when she heard his exultant shout from the garage. She turned the flame out and ran to him.

He was sitting behind the wheel of Vernon's convertible, miming luxurious *degagé* as he "drove." Piled beside him on the seat were cartons of tape from the wallshelf, the prerecorded musical cartridges for the tape-deck machine on the convertible's dashboard.

"Recipro-cerebration," he announced with suavity. "Affectionate to the last, he'd have wanted you to have a bit of childish fun locating this swag, wouldn't he? A kind of child's treasure hunt. Recalling your predilection for Hawaiian music, we find," and he held up a cartridge, "Manny Oahu and his Five Pineapples playing your *Favorite Hawaiian Songs*." He inserted the cartridge into the dash. It was not Manny and his Five Pineapples: it was Vernon's voice.

". . . from starting point drive south at exactly thirty miles per hour, no more no less, until I speak again." Two minutes of silence followed, then the burr of a motor, a passing horn, then the voice again: "Ahead is your first stop light. Turn right at the street this side of it and continue at a speed of exactly twenty miles per hour until my next instruction."

Ralph turned it off, smiled brightly at her, and breathed on his chewed fingernails.

"Does it say where it is?"

"Naturally not, not in so many words, but it *leads* you there. He recorded it as he drove, then substituted the tape for the Hawaiian stuff so you'd find it the first time you turned on Manny Oahu. We turn the tape on, we drive as he directs us, turn for turn. I've heard it clear through. Seventy-two minutes. In his last instruction he says: 'Slow to exactly fifteen miles per hour, follow the road around, and here you are.'"

"But you said—I mean, suppose someone *else* had come across it."

"They wouldn't have had anything, because he doesn't tell you where the 'starting point' is. That's something *you've* got. Somewhere, sometime, he gave you that information. We go back inside. We think."

They thought. Two *days* they thought, lumbering as if blind in that hiatus. "Starting point" wasn't this house; the street ran east and west. It wasn't his office; a stop light was a half block away. They tried in the convertible, driving from selected points as the tape played; but it wasn't his club, wasn't any of the bars he visited, restaurants he frequented, not any of the places with (for Vernon) sentimental connotations anent his wife. Country Club? House where they'd met? Filling station? Noth-

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ing worked; they found not money but dead ends, factory and slum districts and open fields.

Listlessly they returned to prowl through all the rooms of the house. They studied maps and pored over correspondence, memoranda, personalia, and minutiæ, seeking a clue —any kind of clue. By the second evening they had achieved no more than a disgruntlement threatening the hardiest shoots of their love.

"That slimy eel," she said. "You'd almost think he *did* know about us and had planned this all out as some kind of post-mortal revenge."

"You assured me he didn't know."

"No, of *course* he didn't," she snapped. "I just said, what if he had."

"It isn't what you said," Ralph muttered.

"Oh, be quiet," she shouted. "Who cares what anyone said."

Away he went, out of the room, off in a new sulk. Tough for you, she fumed. You, me, and the bill collectors and finance robbers ringing the phone. Maybe this was the price of sin—to get your painted fingernails on the top rung only to lose your grip and fall screaming into the eternal sauna below. Maybe if she'd said a prayer or two during that funeral service she'd have come home and found it right off. But what was there that had been conducive to prayer? That crying woman, that wall-eyed preacher and his irrelevencies: the parable of The Lost Coin. Why that? She had thought it odd at the time. And yes, they had played two of Vernon's favorite hymns at that service but nobody had consulted her or the mother. Which would mean that Vernon, with the minister, must have sometime set up that service just-in-case. Big unselfish gesture. She'd have sold him and his coffin for a case of gin.

The Lost Coin? On an impulse she went to the library, brought down his Bible, and shuffled through. She found the Harmony of the Gospels in its rear. Luke, it had been. Luke 15.8-10.

. . . either what woman having ten pieces of silver, if she lose one piece, doth not light a candle and sweep the house and seek diligently till she find it."

She sat staring away. Luke. *St.* Luke. St. Luke's Place was where Arthur Pettingill lived—*and his address was 158!*

She put the book aside, stretched back in her chair with her eyes closed. So she had it. Did she even need Ralph, the sullen way he'd been acting? What was to prevent him from taking it from her and boarding the first plane? Ridiculous, she'd simply report him and he knew it and—what was wrong with her?—the silly man was everything she loved.

"Ralph!"

How asininely easy it was. From

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the road in front of Pettingill's darkened home they switched on the tape and drove forward. The "first stop light" was just where the tape put it, then the barbecue stand eight minutes farther, the railroad tracks and the road on which the voice specified a 45 mph speed. When the tape next directed them to swing right short of the cowbarn, it was too joyously obvious where they were being led.

She chortled wickedly and leaned over to kiss Ralph as he drove. She studied that handsome wan face by the dashlight. "The mountain cabin," she said, "only he wouldn't just come out and say that, because then if someone else had found the tape they'd have known."

"Found the tape," corrected Ralph, "gone to the memorial service, and known there was something to look for."

"How soon before someone *might* know?"

"It's why we've got to get it and put it away somewhere else."

Happily she listened to the voice's intonations: "Slow here to exactly thirty-five miles per hour. Take the right fork by the two trees. Speed up to exactly forty miles per hour until the next instruction."

"It's like a treasure hunt," she exclaimed. "A child's garden of profits."

As many times as she and Ralph had liaised at that cabin, why hadn't they figured it out? She almost didn't hate Vernon any more. It was just as Ralph had suggested—a last fatherly game with her, his way of making provision, amusing her, and offering a final bit of advice: Nothing is easy; seek and ye shall find. How generous, how fatherly would he have been had he known she'd have a lover riding with her? But that would have been beyond his imagining: she was too pure, too sweet and childishly innocent.

She stretched languidly. And yet, under the same rubric, how could she *really* be positive that Ralph, whom *she'd* thought childlike, hadn't some foul scheme of his own up his (or Vernon's shirt's) sleeve? She could hardly report Ralph's decampment if he first killed her. This she rejected on the most obvious ground: Ralph hadn't the strength.

Anyway, there was this pistol in her purse.

". . . turn left, go uphill at whatever speed is convenient," droned that voice from the dead. Ralph turned; up they bumped behind the headlights, past the sign *PRIVATE ROAD,* uphill, up the mountainside until they were skirting the deep ravine. Downhill, up again, round the bend and now the headlights swung full onto the wooden bridge over the ravine.

But Ralph stopped. He cut the recorder and the engine. Below them, far below, was the rush of the rapids. Her hand found the weapon

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in her purse; her voice was tremulous. "What is it, Ralph?"

"The bridge," Ralph murmured. "Notice something?"

She could see nothing strange.

"Last month there was a sign there: *DANGER, WEAK BRIDGE.*"

"So they've repaired it and taken the sign away."

"Maybe," Ralph said. "And there's another bridge, that suspension footbridge, over the gorge just downslope from where we sit."

"Yes."

He drummed his fingers on the steering wheel. Before them the wooden bridge in the lights. "Allow me to share with you an anecdote," he said finally.

"Go ahead."

"In the days of World War Two, in Africa, it was said, a British officer happened upon a hillside cave thought to house German armament. He had started to enter when he saw a tripwire stretched across the cave's mouth just at his feet. Aha, thought he, and tied some string gently to the wire, then let it out as he went downhill and across the road a safe distance and got into a trench that was dug there. He crouched low and yanked on the string. Up went the trench and the British officer."

"Oh, for heaven's sake, Ralph!"

"No. No for heaven's sake. I've allowed you your one doubt as to your husband's integrity. Now, permit me mine."

She still had not released the pistol. "Well, tell it and then let's get the money."

"You said, suppose he did know about us. Assume, just for caution's sake, that he did and that he planned to have us join him in hell."

"Then why would he have taken the warning sign down?"

"Follow me into that diabolical mind of his. Thinks Vernon Cobb—and listen carefully, I posit here subtleties that would tax M.I.T.—thinks Vernon: 'If I take this sign down *they,* if suspicious, will think: *He* has taken the sign down so *we* will think that *he* wants us to assume the bridge is now safe to cross.' But *alors,* proceeding even further *he* knows that *we,* because of the glaring obviousness of this duplicity, will decide it's not safe at all. Whereupon, thinks Vernon Cobb, 'Deciding the bridge *not* to be safe, they will then dismount from the vehicle, climb down from the road, and cross over on that suspension footbridge which will, through prior arrangement, collapse them four hundred feet into the gorge.' Dost thou follow me, precious one?"

"I'd rather follow you than have to go through all that again, precious one."

He smiled mischievously. He started the motor and eased the car ahead onto the bridge. "Would you like to know my motto, Blanche, the keystone of my whole success?

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Three little words: never trust anybody."

Whereupon the bridge buckled and they plunged 400 feet into the gorge.

"Bangety-boom-boom," said Vernon Cobb. "You win a quarter. She declined not to distrust me."

"Took 'em long enough," said Arthur Pettingill, sitting on the cabin porch, watching the car explode and burn. "They're all alike. *Suspicious?* You take Bertha: right this minute she's thinking I'm out with some woman, whereas Rosie's not finished waiting on tables till two damn A.M."

"Well, we'd better get started if you intend to make it," Vernon said, standing.

Arthur still had to drive him the fifty miles to Lake Katchetan where, on a little island he'd picked out, he'd soon be discovered undrowned. He started down the trail to Arthur's car, parked on a back road. No reason to worry about letting Arthur get behind him, and all that money. Arthur was his best friend, and anyway there wasn't any money. Not any dishonest money, and not where he'd let Blanche think it was. It was in a safe-deposit box a state away, losing interest. A bad way to do things—but it sure beat that alimony grab.

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The man in the Panama hat, Cobb Morris, ex-sergeant and ex-radio operator, had to wait a long time before he could return to the small rocky island of Sardos in the Aegean and take care of the unfinished business that dated back to the War . . . a beautifully written story with a quality that will haunt you a long time after . . .

SUCH A LONG TIME AFTER

by RHONA PETRIE

THE SQUAT FAIR MAN IN THE PANama hat came down the gangplank with a grip in his hand. Behind him there was a little gap before the next passengers were squeezed from the crazy old tub, as though at this final moment they acknowledged he was different. They overlooked how he had been wedged among them, sharing their clacking tongues, their heat, their sweat, and garlic breaths. He went down apart from them, an outsider, branded by his own silence, his Anglo-Saxon blondness, the closed, city set of his tight features.

It had been the foulest of all the squalid craft at the port, sunk below the waterline, indiscriminately crammed with little voluble dark men, baskets of fruit, drums of olive oil, crates of scraggy chickens, straying goats and sheep, all together in one class of travel; no berths, no air conditioning, no expected bar and lounge, and unless you brought it yourself, no food or drink. It served only the least known islands where no tourist penetrated, islands that boasted no ruined column or ancient cistern but only bone-white rock that nourished no remarkable crop. Fourteen hours of heaving on an oily sea, threading between indistinguishable islands with names like the Three Musketeers.

Twice he had tried to make the crossing from Piraeus but the island boats were unaccountable. "Sardos, yes. We call at Sardos. Right there and back, isn't it? Starting at six,"—although the journey was not featured on any of the steamer boards. And the boat, which finally left after nine, had headed southeast, then swung wide to port and had tried to land him at Samos.

Back to the shipping office to the shoulder-raising, palm-turning clerk, so accustomed to ravings and abuse that he would stand demurely downcast with his girlish lashes on the fine brown skin of his cheeks and wait till the storm was past. Then a sweet smile and the upturned palm. More money passing and they'd have another try, find another evil-smelling, seam-bursting

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boat that claimed to stop at Sardos.

Even now, ashore, he could hardly believe he had arrived. He reached out for a lad by the rail, pulled him hard by the forearm. "Sardos?" he demanded, staring him fiercely in the eyes, daring him to lie. "Sardos, Sardos?"

The boy nodded, laughing. "Sardos." He waved his free arm widely, offering the entire island. "Sardos, yes! Here Sardos."

Nothing was familiar on this side. He would have to cross the island to the southwest, identify the village, and then the single low stone house out on the promontory.

He walked over the cobbles on to loose sand, past the three market stalls with their grubby canvas awnings, to the pension-hotel. There were advertisements on its front walls so overgrown by wild vines that you had to guess half the persuasion they should exercise. The man in the Panama hat flicked aside the curtain of plastic strips and went into the cool stone-flagged gloom.

The room they gave him was at the side, overlooking a tiny courtyard. Beyond were the walls and roofs of houses downhill, and as a backdrop, the sea with distant caïques unmoving under a hazy light.

That was how he would leave, not by the offensive little steamer. He would leave as he had come that other time, silently, by dark, in a hired caïque. *If*, of course, his mission was successful. He mustn't count too much on that; it was, after all, a long time after.

Not count too much? He sweated as the phrase went again through his mind. What was *too much*? He was risking everything on this, every last penny, every gram of energy, what might be his last throw of luck. It had to come off.

If it didn't . . . Despite the heat he shivered. When he had slipped away from the tourist party in Athens he had had to leave behind the rest of his tickets with the courier. He had his own passport, but that was no guarantee that the company would see him back later with another party. It wasn't one of the best agencies. Like himself they traveled on the poverty line. He had held his breath here as he booked in, but being English he had not been expected to pay in advance. It would mean a flit when he'd completed his mission. They'd wait a few days, thinking he was working round the island, before they started to make inquiries, and by then it would be too late. But he must be careful which fisherman he approached to take him off, because here they were all related. Word might get back to the hotel.

He unfastened the suitcase and took out the aerosol DDT, spread the clothes he'd worn over the red-tiled floor, and sprayed along the seams. Already angry red lumps showed on the pale skin of his belly, on the inner side of his upper arms

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and over his thighs. Still naked, he pulled the bed apart and treated that, but the bolster he flung out on the balcony as being beyond the DDT.

It had not been like this the other time he had come. He was younger then and tougher, and he hadn't yet developed this nettle rash. Now, as soon as he scratched, the large white blisters would come, filling the space between the fleabites with their lumps of fluid and making his whole body aflame from the roots of his hair to the soles of his feet. It was suffer that or take the capsules that left him a zombie the next day. Even now, through merely thinking of it, the rash had started, symmetrically on his ribs, spreading first with a flush under his skin, and then with the burning itch. Touch it and the weals started rising while you watched.

It had started in Parkhurst when they'd pulled him in for robbery with violence. Nerves, the M.O. had said. Him, Cobb Morris, with nerves! The judge had known better, sentencing him. Cold-blooded indifference to suffering, he'd accused him of, and the old vulture had been no bleeding heart himself, giving the maximum stretch. He knew himself it wasn't nerves that caused the nettle rash but hate, plain white-cold hate for anyone outside while he was captive like an animal. And now that he himself was outside it had become too much of a habit to leave him. He still couldn't be completely free.

Next morning he was living in slow motion because he had taken the capsules, unable to think or move without an effort out of all proportion to its object. Already there was a crowd of boys at the hotel doorway, because, to account for his movements he had given out that he was an amateur geologist interested in the local rocks. They had brought him specimens of anything that came to hand—stones from the roadway, a chunk of concrete, a dried mud ball, chips from an old fireclay sink. They insisted he should allow them to help.

Persistent as flies, they clung to him until the proprietress sprang from the hotel and roundly scolded them as wastrels and villains of uncertain parentage. Sullenly the boys dispersed. She turned back to him, palms turned outward in explanation. If he truly desired a guide she could supply one, but she could not have the place cheapened by this unclean riffraff. Was not today the very day the Magistrate should come and must he not be assured that the hotel was as seemly and respectable as ever? Then she was away herself to make all ready for her honored guest.

By dint of gestures and stamps and pointing the passage of the sun into the west he managed to hire a donkey for the day. It took his precious *drachmae* but would simplify and shorten his quest; also the beast was necessary to carry back his canvas bag of specimens. They were his

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badge of office, his pledge of respectability.

The island, he recalled, was little more than a mile wide here, almost rectangular and lying roughly NE-SW. The point he sought was at the far end, some seven miles as the crow flew. He planned to reach it today by the southern and western route, tomorrow by the northern and western, and work his way slowly there, tapping at rocks with his little hammer, examining strata with his magnifying lens, making important-looking jottings in his notebook. For he knew he would be watched by unseen observers; he knew the suspicious curiosity of these people.

When they were finally accustomed to what he did they would lose interest. Lazily, at noon heat, they would assume he always did the same—tapping, examining, noting down. They would sleep through the haze of midday, pitying the mad stranger who worked on through it. So, in privacy, he would achieve what he had come to do.

At shortly before five o'clock he trained his glasses westward and saw the once-familiar configuration of the cliffs, in profile like a shoulder extending into muscled upper arm and elbow. The elbow leaned some eighty feet over the sea. Above it, but just below the dark fuzz of olive trees, should be the house. Surely from here it would show, standing out black against the gold-lit water. He moved the glasses again over the length of the outline, readjusted them. The house, he now saw, was gone.

Well, that should not surprise him. After they had been taken off and their mission completed, someone would have had to pay for it. The Germans were not ones to lie down and weep. There would have been hostages shot, houses leveled, churches burned with the women driven inside. The Nazis had always known how to discipline peasants. It was mad of him to have supposed for a second that the woman and the child could have possibly survived.

He collected his instruments and packed them, with the unlikely-looking specimens, the pencil and notebook, into the canvas sack, tied the sack to the saddle, mounted and urged the beast down into the valley. There were mosquitoes that rose from the aromatic herbage which sprang back from the donkey's lifted hooves as though the stiff, writhing stems reached out to trip them. Then the beast was scrabbling upward again on rock, and looking back he saw the trap channels where the islanders caught the seawater to run onto the salt pans.

Then he was compelled to dismount and hold the donkey's head, continuing upward on foot and dragging the unwilling, lathered animal after him. And at last he was there—a hundred feet above the flat and inky sea of the bay where they had first come ashore. He began to remember in detail . . .

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The lights went on leading us in —two long flashes and a short one at intervals of two minutes. We had swum the last hundred yards, towing the raft with our provisions. When all was unloaded and the corporal had been sent to bury the explosives at the store point, the major gave the line three sharp tugs and the raft started away again, back to the caïque. Before our eyes the boat began to melt into the darkness.

The man who had guided us in shouldered a pack of the stores and jerked his thumb for us to follow. We picked our way up in silence to the cliff's top, then lay and wriggled on our bellies to the house's open door. When we were in the guide closed and barred the door, set a match to the oil light, and reached out for our hands.

"You've no idea," he told us, "how glad I am to see you!" Captain Ross, Greek scholar and dreamer, sent here by Intelligence to check on the enemy's seaplane base, with his head full of Heroes and ancient gods and incestuous kings and tyrants.

Across the bare table, as though flattened to the wall by it, sat the woman and the small child with their great dark eyes fixed on us as though they were starved and could eat us whole that way. We looked at each other, the R.E. major and corporal, and me a sergeant as radio operator, and we all thought what a bloody place and a bloody job and a bloody poor hope there was of ever getting back from it alive.

The woman was hard, a girl brought here from Corfu, a real island not a half-barren rock like this. Her husband, a fisherman, had been machine-gunned in his boat. She had no cause to love the Germans for that, and she had scant sympathy for her husband's neighbors. She felt herself superior and kept apart. There were men who came out from the village now and then, but she had no need of them, only of their money or of the food they brought.

She existed on fish and the rough barley bread she baked herself, dipped in olive oil and sprinkled with salt. She had figs and goats' milk and sometimes there was a coarse red wine. We taught her to like bully beef and biscuits. She made a sort of hash of them with oil and bitter herbs. The child would eat that until his little stomach swelled and his eyes grew smaller and we lifted him, unconscious, from the table to where he slept with his mother and the captain in the hay. We others lay above them on the flat roof, and above us were only the stars and the occasional homing seaplane.

When a villager came he could be seen from afar by the watcher on the roof and the sign was given. We'd drop the rope end and Captain Ross would climb up hand over hand. Not the child, though. (Spiro his name was, because his mother was from Corfu and she had called him after its saint.) The villagers were accustomed to the child being there

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and if we'd hauled him up with us it would have been a reminder that there was alternative company for him. Ross said the villagers knew all about us but preferred to turn blind eyes.

I hadn't believed this until the night I went with Ross and the major down to the village. We had barely slid past the first house when a boy appeared beside us. *"Tedesci,"* he whispered and waved us away.

Ross pulled us off the street and took us to the back of the church. It was a small squat building of old stone with a dome for lid. A figure stood in the doorway, dark and top-heavy with the oversized priest's headdress. He gave a sudden sharp glance and then looked straight through us. He put out a hand and pushed the door ajar even as he moved aside, coming past us and down to the street.

"Look lively," ordered Ross and we dived inside the building. By the glow of hanging lamps we moved toward the altar. I have never forgotten the major's eyes when he saw it, the hot little pig eyes and the greed flaring in them. That was what first made me realize the value of the junk there—the elaborate gold cross and the primitive icon. Ross went on about it, as he always did, admiring anything ancient, everything Greek. But it was the major's eyes that really told me it was something worth having.

We stayed there almost an hour and then another man came, signaled to Ross and told him in Greek, "It is safe now. They are drinking." As we left the village, singing and drunken laughter reached us through the moonless dark . . .

The man in the Panama hat started awake. The length of the shadows made him reach for his watch; two hours had passed since he mounted the headland. Time now to be heading back to the port and its crummy little hotel, all flies and garlic. The donkey was a dozen yards off, its trailing reins tangled in the giant thistles.

They traveled directly this time, using the central dust trail that served as road for the length of the island. He went through the village whose name he had never known and came to the church. It was not the same, or even where the earlier one had stood. Gazing around, he saw now that none of the neighboring houses was old. Except for the first and last houses of the village, everything had been built since the war. They had suffered, then, for the major's successes. Perhaps there was no one left who might still remember the young Sergeant Cobb Morris.

Next morning he arose early, determined to complete the second route in time to spend a few hours in the wide bay in front of the one where he had come ashore the first time. This was where the German seaplanes had been moored. A metal stairway had been fitted to the cliff,

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giving access at the top to the old olive-oil factory. Here repairs were carried out, and Luftwaffe personnel camped in nearby huts. In the olive groves of the surrounding slopes were stacked drums of fuel, ammunition, and unfused bombs. This was the area to which the major's orders had referred.

Of the old factory nothing now remained, and the olive groves had shifted, but sweeping his glasses from north to west he caught a glimpse of smoke rising and beneath it, in a little hollow, a glint of glass or metal. Here then was the new factory that provided the main industry of the new village with the modern church.

Cobb Morris turned to the sea again and followed the cliff to the bay of the seaplanes. The water lay untroubled by engine or human life. The moorings no longer existed and he looked in vain for the iron stairway that had led down to the shore. At last his field glasses fixed on unnatural details on the ancient rock; dark crags that might be twisted staples, the remains of a handrail tortured by explosion and infernal heat.

It seemed that the major had known his job well. (Or had the islanders, once the enemy was gone, been determined to eradicate every trace of the shameful occupation?)

Once more he saw the stout tense figure of the explosives expert, small hot eyes in greedy enjoyment of the little church's treasure. And where was that treasure now? A pulse beat in his throat as he asked the question he had not before dared to face. He felt the crimson stain of irritation pass under his skin and then the weals begin to rise, equal to the excitement in his mind; but he could not take the capsules now, so near to knowing if his mission was in vain.

Savagely he tugged the donkey's head inland, turning it into the trail that would lead past the new factory and down to the new village. His hands trembled as he stumbled from the donkey, tied its reins to a hitching ring, and then walked up the marble flags to the entrance porch. Inside, the church was cool and hazy with incense. There was an old priest there and a group of young boys moving between the pillars.

The man clasped his Panama hat tight against his straining chest and turned to the altar. Involuntarily a great breath of relief burst from him. The altar was topped with a simple cross of some pale polished wood like sycamore, and no matter how he turned to peer, the primitive old icon was nowhere to be seen. Safe then, the treasure—still safe where he had buried it!

He rode back slowly to the pension-hotel, willing his mind to be patient and wait another day. What was one day more, such a long time after?

At the hotel he was presented to the guest of honor, the Magistrate—a tall grave man with gentle dark eyes. Captain Ross, thought Morris,

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would have seen him as a classic dreamer, a philosopher-king, Homer treading the path of his Heroes. What could bring this distinguished man from Athens to holiday alone on this miserable rock? And to come year after year! Once he himself had found what he came for, he would shake the dust from his shoes, set sail for the mainland, and not see Greece, the Aegean, Europe any more.

The local wine was coarse on his throat, sour on his stomach. He tossed on the hard narrow bed, cursed through nightmares and eternally seeking what he could not remember. When dawn lit the window he was weary and ill-tempered, his skin aflame round the white lumps of his nettle rash.

He took capsules with his coffee and as he went for the donkey he could feel his movements slowing, his mind becoming heavy and dull. He saw himself like the peasants around him, sloppy and unclean and brutishly stupid. He felt he would never get free of them or their stinking island. He imagined what it would be to stay here for the rest of one's life.

That was what Ross, the stupid Grecophile, had wanted. Probably he'd had it too. If he and the major hadn't been blown up in their own firework display, the Germans must have got them. Ross would have ended his life as he'd wished, here on Sardos.

Today Morris chose more carefully the stones for his collection, throwing out those which had no interesting lines of color. He remembered now what Ross had said about the island's name—that it might be a corruption of *sadios,* an onyx with layers of white and yellow. Strange how today Ross was so often in his mind, like a ghost from a long time back.

Morris went this time directly, by the road and through the village, to the spur where the house had once been. And this time, kicking among the roots of wild sage and heath, he came upon flat stones, the foundations of a building. He stood on the spot where they all had lived, with the woman and the child Spiro. He did not know her name, had never heard it spoken. She was always "the woman." Too much the woman, in fact. That was what had set that fool Greek amok, thinking of the woman here every night with Ross while he skulked in the village and must wait and take his turn in walking out here.

He had not gone to the Germans with his story. That was not the islanders' way. They cherished their hates secretly, nurtured them into great bloody passions that only death could satisfy. That is why he had filched that drum of petrol from the Germans' dump, doctored it, and sent it on its mad career down the hill from the olive trees. Not caring if he lost the woman too . . .

The major was on watch on the

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roof. We heard his sudden cry as we sat at cards round the table. It was the corporal who got out through the door first and we scarcely knew the danger before he had raced to the bouncing object, scooped it up, and staggered away through the scrub on the side of the hill, down toward the sea. We saw him stumble rolling with the drum over and over to the rocks below, and then the night burst into sudden day as the thing exploded.

The very hill shook with the thud of the bomb burst, and soon after came the roar of Volkswagens, voices shouting, and the slather of boots on rock. The major would not let us run inland. Sweating, we all three lay flat on the roof while the woman and Spiro ran down to the Germans, shouting in alarm, demanding protection, begging them to leave a guard at the lonely house. There were the officers' voices below us and then we smelled the bitter aroma of the ersatz coffee she made from stolen barley, winnowed and slowly roasted. A patrol returned from the beach to report on the explosion. There had been nothing left to show he was anything more than a Greek. A dark boy, the corporal had been. His name was Evans.

They had reacted quickly in the village. Even before the Germans returned there, they had guessed and judged and executed. It was the Greek's body that they threw at the Luftwaffe officers' feet, for then he could tell no story at variance with their own. This one had plotted with the other who had blown himself up. A watcher had seen them go that night to the olive grove. They found a hole cut in the wire where the villains must have broken through to bring disgrace and dishonor on their village. The Germans had accepted the version they offered. After a pause of four days the three of us remaining breathed freely and went on with our plans for destroying the base.

On the night before the attempt I sent a prearranged signal on my transmitter. We received the go-ahead. We were to be picked up at 1:00 a.m. at the spot where we had landed. I passed this message to the major and he confirmed my orders —to remain at the house and contact the landing party. Ross was taking over the corporal's function; the scheme was big enough to need two men at least.

As soon as dark fell on the night of the plan, the major and Ross disappeared. I sent off an OK signal on the selected wavelength and then disappeared myself. I had a private scheme of my own. By midnight it was completed and the church treasure buried deep in a recess I'd found in the cliff near the house. Then, as ordered, I went down to the shore to contact our transport.

It didn't all go as planned. Something misfired and jumped the gun. At 12:50 there was a single explosion and fire swept down the hill to the factory. When that was going nicely

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all hell broke loose down by the seaplanes. The whole island shook and flames blotted out the stars. By then I was aboard the British submarine and saw it all by periscope.

The rubber dinghy had gone back for the other two and although we lay offshore till first light it never returned. In his log the commander wrote, "Two passengers did not report on board. Dinghy and CPO Halliday lost." . . .

Cobb Morris removed his Panama hat and wiped from his brow the sweat that had gathered in the groove the hat had left. The sun whirled, a disc of white light almost above him. Noon and everyone asleep. No sound came up from the factory in the hollow where the workers had crept away to rest under the trees. No one would see when he went to locate his treasure.

The little trowel he used for digging out his specimen stones was quite inadequate. There had been a rockfall and the cliff face here was covered for a distance of twenty yards, to a height of over ten. If he was to uncover his hiding place he must lift the rocks by hand and drop each in turn down into the sea.

The sun moved on and he knew there might be men on the cliff by now, curiously looking down on his frantic burrowings. Even the caïques out to sea could be full of eyes that followed each movement as he bent and staggered and straightened, a dark fly moving on the rock face.

But he no longer controlled his own actions. He was moved by the power of greed and the memory of riches. He had to know if the canister was still there. It was a drum that had come ashore with them. As the supplies were used, Morris was detailed to get rid of the containers in the sea, weighted down with rocks. But this one he had brought here, had excavated the recess, and fitted it in deep to await the dismantled loot. He knew it would be impossible to smuggle such bulk aboard any craft the navy would provide to take them off, but he could always come back for it later. He hadn't intended it to be as long a time after as this, but there had been no chance during the war and then for some years he'd buried it under more immediate get-rich-quick plans.

When at last he had come out of Parkhurst, the newspapers were full of the cylinders just found in the sand at Weston-super-Mare. They had lain undisturbed since the end of the war, the forgotten brainchildren of some forgotten technical expert. The bomb-disposal squad had had to float them out to open water, sink them deep, and then explode them all. It was reading this that brought Morris' mind back to the cylinder he had himself buried so long ago, in the less frequented Aegean.

He went on lifting, carrying, dropping, and now there was a fragment of stone he seemed to remember, a yellowish rhomboid flat

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as a slab of slate. His hands trembled and he tore at the stones beside it, unconscious of his split and bleeding fingers. The westering sun reflected on metal, dull and green-painted. His breath sobbed in his throat as he scrabbled at the rocks packed on either side of the hole.

Then suddenly they were free and he saw the signs he had once scratched on to identify the drum. Such a long time after, and the treasure was still there!

He knew he should now pack the stones back across the secret and return to the hotel at the port, but restraint was impossible now that he had gone so far. He went on pulling at the close-packed stones while the sweat ran into his eyes, although the sun had now passed beyond the elbow of rock and the air should have felt cooler.

At length he placed his palms flat on each side of the cylinder and drew it slowly toward him. The farther rim came clear of the gap and as he swung the drum down to stand it on the ledge, the change of axis was marked by a definite click.

It flooded over him, a distant memory as a raw recruit . . . his RSM's lecture on booby traps. "If anything clicks when you touch it, run!—if it's not too late!"

Fast as the thought came, he knew he *was* too late. He had come, he realized, far too long a time after . . .

The Magistrate rode down to the new village on the stiff black mare they had been offering him for years. They were poor on the island but for this they would not take payment. When at last she lay down and died they would commandeer another and offer that, from the island to its most respected visitor.

He came into the village and dismounted by the new pale church. Father Stephanides, who had been expecting him, came hobbling down the marble flagstones. The Magistrate read the question in the old priest's eyes and looked to the sea.

"You saw him at the pension?" the priest insisted.

The Magistrate nodded. "It was the same one. I would have known him no matter how long after."

"It is justice," said the priest, but his voice rose as though he questioned what he stated.

"We killed him," said the Magistrate, "we of Sardos. Had it not been for him the treasure would have been blasted to pieces with the church. We should remember that he saved the island. Because of him we were able to build again."

"It is done now. It was all decided long ago."

The Magistrate drew his gaze from the sea and from the distant cliff which, in profile, had until this day stretched like an elbow to the water. He looked into the little black eyes of the priest, deep-set in the questioning gray-bearded face. *I do not know,* he answered them, without speaking; *I do not know if we must forever go on punishing.*

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"Spiro, my son, go in peace," the priest told him. They touched hands and the Magistrate remounted.

All the way back, as he rode, he remembered. *I remember too well,* he told himself, *even such a long time after.* He remembered the four Englishmen who had come under his mother's roof; the tall calm captain he had loved like a father; the major of the lusting eyes; the corporal who had died to save them; the cold squat sergeant who had lived on until today.

He had known when they were about to leave. All the village had known and watched them, ready to flee themselves as soon as danger was unleashed. Already they were moving out as the major and captain stole off with the charges. For himself he had been instructed to follow the sergeant. This was the one the village most feared. And with what reason!

Spiro had seen and marked where the sergeant had buried the holy treasure that he looted from the church. The priest, when he had told him, had allowed it to remain where it was hidden, and had taken the child and his mother with him when he sailed in secret for Cyprus. There they had stayed until the Germans withdrew. The treasure had been sold at last to rebuild the village which the enemy had razed. It had built too the beautiful new church. Spiro, at the priesthood's expense, had been sent to the mainland and educated in Athens. But he had not returned to Sardos in their black robes; instead he had turned to the Law, more concerned with man's justice than God's.

Now, by man's law, a murder had been committed. And he himself was the only witness. Having so perfect a memory of his return from Cyprus, he knew who had been charged with reclosing the recess in the cliff after the treasure's recovery. It was Antoniades, a silent and grieving man, twin brother to that one who had sent the other drum bouncing down the hill from the olive trees.

The Magistrate turned the mare's head and looked back. The house was no longer there, or even the cliff where it once had stood. So many men were dead since this was begun . . .

With sudden impatience he swung the mare back on its homeward path. He was weary of the affair and of the Law's minute vendettas. The place was gone, the victims were gone, and none remained now to require a judgment of him. It was, indeed, such a long time after.

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Mr. Strang delivers another Lecture

Mr. Strang, the high-school science teacher with a flair for clues and a talent for deductions, escorts 27 of his students to the Natural History Museum of Central City on what was supposed to be an educational field trip. Well, it proved educational all right! Mr. Strang became involved in a "miracle" problem—an "impossible" crime in which an Inca burial mask, pre-Columbian and made of solid gold, vanished into thin air . . .

MR. STRANG TAKES A FIELD TRIP

by WILLIAM BRITTAIN

THE YELLOW BUS WITH *Aldershot High School* painted on its side in large black letters came to a creaking halt in front of the Central City Natural History Museum. As the driver opened the door, the 27 teen-agers inside shifted excitedly in their seats. Mr. Strang, his battered felt hat perched squarely on the middle of his head to hide a bald spot that was increasing in size at an alarming rate, stood up and hobbled stiffly down the steps of the bus, followed by his biology students who milled about in what looked like utter confusion.

Silently the short slender teacher raised one hand over his head. The shrill yelps of the girls and the raucous comments of the boys stopped abruptly. The students formed themselves into two straight lines that would have done credit to a Marine drill instructor. With a quick nod Mr. Strang then led his class into the building.

"Ouch!" Mr. Strang turned just in time to see the boy at the head of one line clutch at the seat of his pants, a distressed look on his face. The teacher glared at the second boy in line and held out his hand.

"The pin, Mr. Grier," he said wryly. "Give me the pin, if you please."

Smirking, Bradley Grier handed Mr. Strang the long map pin with which he had jabbed his fellow student.

"I'd hoped that for just this one day you would forego the practical jokes, Bradley," said the teacher. "We go on few enough field trips without having you ruin them with your childish attempts at humor. You and I can discuss your little prank later, but right now the doors of the museum are about to open. We'll be among the first ones inside,

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and I hope the place won't be a shambles when we leave."

Inside the museum Mr. Strang ushered his class to the foot of a long curving stairway leading upward. "We'll go straight up to the top floor to The Hall of Mammals and work our way down from there," he announced. "Any questions?"

Seeing no raised hands, the teacher started up the steps. The students broke ranks, pausing from time to time to look at the stuffed animals placed on each landing.

"Git yer hands off off that before I report you!" Mr. Strang turned to see Bradley Grier, his arms still wrapped around an enormous grizzly bear which seemed to be embracing him lovingly in return. The boy was looking guiltily at a small man in a leather workman's apron who eyed the group belligerently.

"I been from top to bottom of this building today collecting exhibits for cleaning," snarled the man. "They've had everything on 'em from shoe polish to bubble gum. I just finished brushing down that bear not more'n two hours ago, and there's about twenty more animals in the basement to do. So look, but don't touch!"

Mr. Strang found himself wishing that Bradley had chosen today for one of his numerous absences from school.

The members of the class reached the top floor and found themselves facing two large arched doorways. Bronze letters over the left doorway read INDIANS OF THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE; to the right was the entrance to THE HALL OF MAMMALS. A smaller sheet-metal door at the extreme right end of the hallway had a cardboard sign saying *Employees Only,* and Mr. Strang wondered how long it would be before one of the students pulled the ancient gag of asking to see the stuffed employees.

The Hall of Mammals was devoted almost entirely to unusual types of furred animals. Just inside the doorway a duck-billed platypus lay curled around its egg on top of a glass case filled with small creatures neatly classified as being either carnivorous or herbivorous. Beyond this was the skeleton of a burro supported by hidden braces, and a vampire bat hung from the ceiling, its enormous wings outstretched. Even the mighty sperm whale was represented in the middle of a grouping of aquatic mammals by a single tooth almost twelve inches in length.

While his students dashed from one zoological oddity to another, Mr. Strang stood in front of a large niche in one wall. At one side of the niche an oppossum and an Australian koala, mounted on polished wooden pedestals high enough to bring them to eye level, were separated from a Tasmanian devil on a similar stand by an empty space of about four feet. The devil, which resembled a small long-tailed bear,

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had lips curled back to reveal sharp teeth, and Mr. Strang was glad the little monster wasn't alive.

"Mean-looking thing, isn't he?"

The teacher turned to face a tall cadaverous man who wore the gray blazer of a museum attendant. "My name's Talbot," said the man in a soft voice, extending his hand, "and you must be Mr. Strang. We were told to expect your class. I'm assigned to The Hall of Mammals, so if you have any questions please feel free to ask."

Mr. Strang shook Talbot's hand and then glanced to one side just in time to see Bradley Grier, accompanied by another student, disappear through a doorway at the rear.

"Where does that lead?" asked the teacher warily, gesturing toward the rear door.

"Just into the next room—the Indian exhibit," replied Talbot. "Don't worry about the boys. Our Mr. Albemarle has charge of that area. He'll look after them."

"It's not the boys I'm worried about. It's—"

Mr. Strang was abruptly interrupted by the roar of a man's voice from the next room. The cry was one of mingled outrage and disbelief. "It's gone!"

As the shout echoed off the museum's marble walls, the babbling of the students stopped abruptly, creating an eerie silence. There was a sound of footsteps tapping across a hard surface, and then a man appeared in the rear doorway.

The man, who wore a blazer similar to Talbot's, stood there a moment, an angry expression on his face. Finally he spotted Mr. Strang and pointed an accusing finger in the teacher's direction.

"One of your kids stole my mask," said the man, striding purposefully toward Mr. Strang, "and I want it back. Now where is it?"

The teacher stared at the man in amazed silence. It was Talbot who finally spoke up. "Mr. Albemarle," he said stiffly, "this is Mr. Strang. He's here on a field trip with his class, and he hasn't been out of my sight since he got to this floor. Now what's this all about?"

"Well, maybe the teacher hasn't been out of your sight, but you can't say the same for the kids," said Albemarle. "Two of them came through the door back there and were looking at the Indian exhibits. I went to see if I could help them, and that is when I saw the mask was missing."

"What mask?" asked Mr. Strang.

"Come on and I'll show you," said Albemarle. "When are you teachers going to learn how to look after your classes while they're in the museum? That's your job, isn't it—to keep them from stealing and wrecking everything in sight?"

Restraining an impulse to plant a foot in Albemarle's ample backside, Mr. Strang followed the attendant into the next room. As he walked through the doorway, two boys standing next to one wall launched

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themselves at the teacher and began chattering loudly.

"We didn't do nothin', Mr. Strang!"

"Look, sir, if this man would just tell us what's missing—"

Mr. Strang considered the youth who was standing beside Bradley Grier. "Why, Mr. Fellman," said the teacher with a mocking smile, "imagine meeting you here. Did you and Bradley decide to take a little stroll, or were you planning to escape from the rest of the class?"

"This isn't funny, Mr. Strang," moaned Steven Pellman. "Bradley and me—I—well, anyway, we just wanted to see what was in here. And we hadn't been in this room more than a minute when that museum guard grabbed us and started yelling about how we stole something. I still don't know what he's talking about."

"I'll show you what I'm talking about," growled Albemarle as he motioned for Mr. Strang to follow him.

The room containing the Indian exhibits was divided neatly down the middle by a velvet rope. On one side were displays of North American Indians, featuring cases full of flint arrowheads and other artifacts and a full-sized war canoe and teepee. On the other were the Central and South American Indian exhibits. Albemarle led the teacher across the room and pointed to a spot on one wall behind a high rack of pottery.

Set in a circular pattern on the wall were a group of the most grotesque masks that Mr. Strang had ever seen. Made of wood, stone, and other materials, their bulging eyes, thick, rounded mouths, and oddly colored chins and cheeks made a display which was both fascinating and frightening.

On the wall in the center of the circle was a dark wooden plaque about 18 inches square. But whatever had been mounted on the plaque was now gone.

"It was an Inca burial mask," said Albemarle. "Pre-Columbian, and solid gold, too. That thing was worth a fortune, and one of these two took it. Probably both of them had a hand in it."

"If one of my students took it I'll get it back for you," said Mr. Strang.

"What do you mean, 'if'? They're the only ones who have been in here this morning." Albemarle pointed to the large arched doorway at the other end of the room. "I haven't been more than ten feet from that entrance since I came to work," he said. "Nobody could have come through there without my seeing them. The only other way in here is from The Hall of Mammals next door. And your kids are the only ones who have been on this floor so far today. Most people start their looking downstairs. We don't get much of a crowd here until noon."

"And of my class only these two, Grier and Pellman, came into this room. Is that right?"

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"That's right."

"Any possibility that they could have taken the mask out of here—say, into The Hall of Mammals?"

"None at all. I had my eye on them from the moment they came in. Oh, they could have gotten the mask off the wall without my seeing it—that shelf of pottery hides the place where the mask was hanging from the front doorway. But they didn't go back next door. I'm sure of that."

Mr. Strang turned to the two students. "You've heard what the man said, boys," he murmured, "and I think you'll agree the joke's gone far enough. Now where did you put it?"

Bradley Grier and Steve Pellman were pictures of outraged innocence. Mr. Strang noticed that the rest of his students were now gathering in the rear doorway.

"Keep them in the next room, please, Mr. Talbot," called Mr. Strang. He turned back to the two boys standing at the wall. "If you don't tell me where that infernal thing is," he went on, "I'm going to have to treat this not as a joke but as an attempt to steal museum property. So for the last time, where is that mask?"

Steve Pellman took a step forward. "Honest, Mr. Strang," he began, "we didn't take anything. Sure, we looked at that board on the wall. Brad asked me what I thought was mounted on it. Before I could answer, this man grabbed both of us."

"Mr. String, or whatever your name is," said Albemarle, "that mask was one of the most valuable articles in this museum. Why, the gold in it alone must be worth a lot of money, to say nothing of its archeological value. And if it doesn't turn up I'm just going to have to call the police."

The police! Mr. Strang pictured himself trying to explain to his principal how he took a class on a field trip and got involved with the police. "Wait a minute," he said placatingly. "How big was this mask?"

"Why, it was—well, the size of a mask. Made to fit over a man's face. And real thick. That gold was—"

"Then it's not exactly the type of object one could slip into a pocket and walk off with, is it?" asked the teacher.

"No, I guess not—not unless you had oversized pockets. Even then, there would be quite a bulge."

"Then you'll agree that neither of the boys has it on his person?"

"Why, yes, I suppose so," replied Albemarle, looking closely at the students in their tight-fitting clothing.

"And you admit they didn't leave this room?"

Albermarle nodded.

"Then the mask has to be somewhere in this room. I suggest that you and I search for it. And you might tell Mr. Talbot to keep any other visitors off this floor until we're finished."

Mr. Strang considered his theory

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to be flawless. But the fact remained that half an hour later he and Albemarle were covered with dust, the exhibit of INDIANS OF THE WESTERN HEMISPHERE had been thoroughly searched—and the mask was still missing.

"It's impossible," said Albemarle, rubbing his hands against his now grimy blazer. "Nobody has it, it isn't here—what could have happened to it?"

Mr. Strang rubbed his hand across his forehead, leaving streaks of dirt over one eye. He set his jaw grimly. "I may have been mistaken about the mask's being still in this room," he said, "but we know for sure the boys haven't been off this floor. Now I'm going to take my class outside to the top of the stairs. Mr. Talbot can stay with them. You and I are going over this entire floor with a fine-tooth comb. And when we've found the mask—which we're certain to do—we'll come back in here and wring the necks of both these boys."

"But Mr. Strang—" began Bradley Grier.

"Shut up," replied the red-faced teacher in a most unprofessional burst of anger. "Right now I want to be left alone with my thoughts—which at present concern slow lingering torture for you and Steve Pellman."

The class was led to the landing at the top of the stairs. After glancing at each student in turn and examining two of the girls' larger handbags, Albemarle announced that he was satisfied that nobody had the mask in his possession. At that, leaving Talbot with the students, he and Mr. Strang went into The Hall of Mammals.

"What about these stuffed animals?" asked Mr. Strang, picking up the koala from its stand and shaking it. "Is there any way one of them could be cut open and—"

"Not a chance," said Albemarle. "The skins are mounted over fiberglass shells. Nothing short of an ax would go through them. Even then, there'd be a sound like a bass drum. See?"

The attendant struck his knuckles against a racoon mounted on the branch of a tree. There was a hollow, booming sound. "It would be impossible to do it without somebody seeing or hearing," he concluded.

"Then our search shouldn't take long," said the teacher.

It didn't. In less than half an hour the room was carefully searched, the mask was still missing, and Mr. Strang was considering the possibility that black magic was involved.

"Priapuloidea!" muttered the teacher. "The mask has to be on this floor, doesn't it? I mean, you saw it here earlier, didn't you?"

"That's right. I inspect all my exhibits when I come to work. That mask was in place at least an hour before the museum opened."

"Then it has to be here—but it isn't," said Mr. Strang, walking out

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of The Hall of Mammals. He glanced at the metal door at the end of the hall. "There's a place we haven't searched. What's in there?"

"An elevator shaft," said Albemarle.

"Oh? Then maybe—"

"Maybe somebody pitched the mask into the shaft? Forget it, Mr. Strang. That door can only be opened from the other side—so nobody will fall through it by accident."

Mr. Strang had to remind himself sternly that teachers must not break down in front of their students.

Tired, dusty, and bedraggled, the teacher walked out to the head of the stairs where Steve Pellman and Bradley Grier were standing near Talbot. Mr. Strang looked at the boys, a forlorn expression on his face.

"Where?" he asked simply.

"Honest, Mr. Strang, we didn't —" Steve began.

"Forget it, Steve," interrupted Bradley. "He's got it all figured out that we did it no matter how much we deny it. He can't think of anything except that we took it. I guess that's what the great Mr. Strang calls 'keeping an open mind'."

The other students held their collective breath as Mr. Strang glared at Bradley. They were waiting for the verbal explosion which the boy's insolence would undoubtedly trigger off. The teacher clenched his fists, and his eyes flashed. Then the anger died, the thin shoulders slumped wearily, and a low chuckle came from the teacher.

"You're absolutely right, Bradley," he said softly, "although you might have put it a bit more delicately. My procedure up to now has been most unfair and highly unscientific. I'm afraid I've allowed your previous reputation to influence my thinking. Still, the mask is missing. Do you have any suggestions for it?"

"Mr. Strang," replied Bradley, a note of relief in his voice, "you've always told us there's no problem that can't be solved if enough thought is given to it. It seems to me—excuse me, sir—that now's a good time for you to either—er—put up or shut up."

"Umm." Deep in thought, the teacher walked slowly to the entrance of The Hall of Mammals. He paused and scratched his head. Peering through the doorway he could see the opossum and the koala perched innocently on their stands.

And then he remembered something Albemarle had told him.

"Outrageous," he murmured to himself, "and yet there's no other possible—"

"What are you mumbling about?" asked Albemarle. "I'm going to have to call the police and report—"

"Just a minute, please," said Mr. Strang, waving his hand impatiently. "That opossum on the stand, Mr. Albemarle—did you know the opossum is native to North America?"

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"What's that got to do with the mask?"

Before answering, Mr. Strang slowly removed his glasses from his inside jacket pocket. After polishing them on his necktie he held them in one hand, making jabbing motions in the air. The other hand was inserted deep into a jacket pocket. Although the ritual was new to Albemarle, the students of Aldershot High School were quite familiar with it.

Mr. Strang, having considered all facets of the problem at hand, was prepared to deliver a Lecture.

"Before I answer your question," he replied, "I'd like you to consider something, Mr. Albemarle. Since you first announced that the mask was missing we've gone on the assumption that it was hidden on this floor. And yet we've searched everywhere and not found it. Isn't it obvious, therefore, that we were wrong —that the mask is somewhere else?"

"But it's got to be here."

"Why?"

"Look, Mr. Strang, Talbot and I came up here at eight o'clock. That was two hours before the museum opened. You and your class got here about ten fifteen. And nobody has left this floor this morning!"

"No?" Mr. Strang turned to Bradley Grier. "On the way up the stairs earlier you had a slight altercation with a museum employee— the man in the leather apron. Do you remember what he said about his work, Bradley, something that might have a bearing on our problem?"

"I don't think so. Hey—wait a minute! He said he'd been from top to bottom of the museum collecting animals for cleaning."

"From top to bottom," repeated Mr. Strang. "And this is the top floor of the museum, isn't it? So we were *not* the only ones up here. That workman came up and left again. I further suggest, Mr. Albemarle, that in collecting the animals he had to use the elevator to take them to the basement where he does whatever repairs are necessary."

"Wait a minute," said Albemarle. "Are you trying to pin this on old Ernie Frye?"

"Frye? Is that the man's name?"

"It is. And he's been working in this museum more than twenty-five years. He takes better care of the exhibits than most people do of their kids. Nobody's going to make me believe that Ernie stole—"

"You said the mask is extremely valuable."

"Sure it is. But Ernie? Impossible! Besides, he never was actually on this floor. He waited inside the elevator while Talbot and I brought him the things to be cleaned."

"What did you send down, Mr. Albemarle?"

"Why, let me see. There was a feather headdress and a llama's hair robe. I guess Talbot sent down a couple of animals. I heard him moving some things around after I got back to my post."

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"I see. I don't suppose there's any possibility that you could have sent the mask down with the other things accidentally?"

Albemarle shook his head. "Ernie gave me a receipt for the headdress and the robe," he said. "He'd have spotted that mask right away if I'd had it. Besides, there are seven men working with him in the basement. One of them would have been sure to see something as big as the mask and ask Ernie about it."

Mr. Strang smiled. "Splendid," he said. "We can therefore eliminate Mr. Frye as the thief. I suspect, however, that he was the means by which the mask was taken off this floor."

"But how was it done without anybody seeing it?"

Mr. Strang took Albemarle by the arm and guided him into The Hall of Mammals. There he pointed dramatically to the niche containing the opossum, the koala, and the Tasmanian devil.

"Notice the empty space between the koala and the Tasmanian devil," said the teacher. "That space—about four feet—must have contained one of the animals that Mr. Talbot sent down for cleaning. I suspect that animal carried off the mask."

"You mean it was something alive?" asked Albemarle in surprise.

"Hardly," said Mr. Strang. "But here, in a single group, are an opossum from North America and a koala, found primarily in Australia. Then there's that empty space and the Tasmanian devil on the other side of it. It occurred unlikely to me that the three animals were just placed together haphazardly. If they weren't, then they must have something in common, even though they came from different parts of the world."

"In common? Like what?" asked Albemarle.

"Remember what you said when I asked about the size of the mask? You said nobody could conceal it *unless he had oversized pockets.* Do you know what a marsupial is, Mr. Albemarle?"

"No. Talbot's the animal man around here."

"It's an animal which has a pouch for carrying its young. Or, if you will, an oversized pocket. All three of these animals are marsupials—that's their common factor, the reason the four of them were placed in the same niche. Now what other animal with a pouch would fit into the empty space? It would have to be fairly large since it obviously wasn't set on a stand like the others."

"A kangaroo!" cried Albemarle, snapping his fingers.

"Exactly—a kangaroo. An animal nearly the size of a grown man. The one animal with a pouch or pocket large enough to contain the mask."

"And nobody would notice if the mask were hidden in the pouch," added Albemarle. "But look, the only one who could have hidden

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the mask there without being noticed is—"

"Mr. Talbot," replied the teacher. "He must have slipped through the rear door into the Indian Hall while you were at the elevator with Frye. After he'd taken the mask from the wall he came back in here, hid the mask in the kangaroo's pouch, then moved the animal out to the elevator door. You suspected nothing because you didn't even realize anything was missing until we got here. You said yourself that except for your one inspection when you first came on the job today, you didn't move from the front door of the Indian Hall."

"Then the mask must be in the basement right now," said Albemarle. "And Talbot's got to get it before somebody down there starts working on that kangaroo."

"If you're looking for Mr. Talbot," said Bradley Grier, who was standing at the front doorway of The Hall of Mammals, "you'd better hurry. He just started downstairs. He said something about calling the police and that we should wait—"

Albemarle looked around excitedly and finally yanked a bone from the skull of the burro's skeleton. Waving the white bone over his head like a club, he dashed through the doorway and down the stairs, calling loudly for Talbot to stop. Mr. Strang, moving more slowly, arrived at the top of the stairs just in time to see Talbot overtaken by his pursuer who brought the bone crashing down on Talbot's head.

Half an hour later the missing exhibit had been retrieved from its unique hiding place. A tired but completely happy Mr. Strang stood with his class and watched Ernie Frye remount the glittering golden burial mask on the wall of the Hall of Indians. He felt a touch on his sleeve and turned to an equally joyful Mr. Albemarle.

"What a day this has been," said the attendant. "For a teacher, you're quite a detective, Mr. Strang."

"And you, Mr. Albemarle, were a veritable Samson," replied the teacher.

"Samson?"

Mr. Strang pointed to the piece of bone which was still clutched in Albemarle's hand. "The burro's skull," said the teacher. "Didn't Samson also defeat his enemy with the jawbone of an ass?"

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CELIA FREMLIN

A contemporary example of what the late Anthony Boucher (and oh, how he is missed!), the great critic of "The New York Times" and of EQMM, once named Gothica—and distinguished by Celia Fremlin's firmness of style and strong texture of plot . . .

SOMETHING EVIL IN THE HOUSE

by CELIA FREMLIN

LOOKING BACK, I FIND IT VERY hard to say just when it was that I first began to feel anxious about my niece, Linda. No, anxious is not quite the right word, for of course I have been anxious about her many times during the ten years she has been in my care. You see, she has never been a robust girl, and when she first came to live with me, a nervous, delicate child of twelve, she seemed so frail that I really wondered sometimes if she would survive to grow up.

However, I am happy to say that she grew stronger as the years passed, and I flatter myself that by gentle, common-sense handling and abundant affection I have turned her into as strong and healthy a young woman as she could ever have hoped to be. Stronger, I am sure, (though perhaps I shouldn't say this) than she would have been if my poor sister Angela had lived to bring her up.

No, it was not anxiety about Linda's health that has troubled me during the past weeks; nor was it simply a natural anxiety about the wisdom of her engagement to John Barrow. He seemed a pleasant enough young man, with his freckled, snub-nosed face and ginger hair. Though I have to admit I didn't really take to him myself—he made me uneasy in some way I can't describe. But I would not dream of allowing any prejudice of mine to stand in the way of the young couple—there is nothing I detest more than this sort of interference by the older generation.

All the same, I must face the fact that it was only after I heard of their engagement that I began to experience any qualms about Linda—those first tremors of a fear that was

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to grow and grow until it became an icy terror that never left me, day or night.

I think it was in September that I first became aware of my uneasiness—a gusty September evening with autumn in the wind, in the trees, everywhere. I was cycling up the long gentle hill from the village after a particularly wearisome and inconclusive committee meeting of the Women's Institute. I was tired, so tired that before I reached the turning into our lane I found myself getting off my bicycle to push it up the remainder of the slope—a thing I have never done before.

For in spite of my 54 years I am a strong woman, and a busy one. I cycle everywhere, in all weathers, and it is rare indeed for me to feel tired. Certainly the gentle incline between the village and our house had never troubled me before. But tonight, somehow, the bicycle might have been made of lead—I felt as if I had cycled fifteen miles instead of the bare one and a half from the village; and when I turned into the dripping lane, and the evening became almost night under the overhanging trees, I became aware not only of tiredness, but of an indefinable foreboding. The dampness and the autumn dusk seemed to have crept into my very soul, bringing their darkness with them.

Well, I am not a fanciful woman. I soon pulled myself together when I reached home, switched on the lights, and made myself a cup of tea. Strong and sweet it was, the way I always like it. Linda often laughs at me about my tea—she likes hers so thin and weak that I sometimes wonder why she bothers to pour the water into the teapot at all, instead of straight from the kettle to her cup!

So there I sat, the comfortable old kitchen chair drawn up to the glowing stove, and I waited for the warmth and the sweet tea to work their familiar magic. But somehow, this evening, they failed. Perhaps I was really *too* tired; or perhaps it was the annoyance of noticing from the kitchen clock that it was already after eight. As I have told you, I am a busy woman, and to find that the tiresome meeting must have taken a good two hours longer than usual *was* provoking, especially as I had planned to spend a long evening working on the Girls' Brigade accounts.

Whatever it may have been, somehow I couldn't relax. The stove crackled merrily, the tea was delicious, yet I sat, still tense and uneasy, as if waiting for something.

And then, somehow, I must have gone to sleep, quite suddenly, because the next thing I knew I was dreaming. Quite a simple, ordinary sort of dream it will seem to you—nothing alarming, nothing even unusual in it, and yet you will have to take my word for it that it had all the quality of a nightmare.

I dreamed that I was watching

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Linda at work in the new house. I should explain that for the past few months Linda has not been living here with me, but in lodgings in the little town where she works, about six miles from here. It is easier for her to get to and from her office, and also it means that she and John can spend their evenings working at the new house they have been lucky enough to get in the Estate on the outskirts of the town. The house is not quite finished yet, and they are doing all the decorating themselves—I believe John is putting up shelves and cupboards and all kinds of clever fittings. I am telling you this so that you will see that there was nothing intrinsically nightmarish about the setting of my dream—on the contrary, the little place must have been full of happiness and bustling activity—the most unlikely background for a nightmare that you could possibly imagine.

Well, in my dream I was there with them. Not with them in any active sense, you understand, but hovering in that disembodied way one does in dreams—an observer, not an actor on the scene. Somewhere near the top of the stairs I seemed to be, and looking down I could see Linda through the door of one of the empty little rooms. It was late afternoon in my dream, and the pale rainy light gleamed on her flaxen-pale hair making it look almost metallic—a sort of shining gray. She had her back to me, and she seemed absorbed in painting the far wall of the room—I heard that suck-sucking noise of the paint brush with extraordinary vividness.

And as I watched her I began to feel afraid. She looked so tiny and thin, and unprotected; her fair, childlike head seemed poised so precariously on her white neck—even her absorption in the painting seemed in my dream to add somehow to her peril. I opened my mouth to warn her—to warn her of I know not what—but I could make no sound, as is the way of dreams.

It was then that the whole thing slipped into a nightmare. I tried to scream, to run, I struggled in vain to wake up—and as the nightmare mounted I became aware of footsteps, coming nearer and nearer through the empty house.

"It's only John!" I told myself in the dream, but even as the words formed themselves in my brain I knew that I had touched the very core of my terror. This man whose every glance and movement had always filled me with uneasiness—already the light from some upstairs room was casting his shadow, huge and hideous, across the landing—

I struggled like a thing demented to break the paralysis of nightmare. And then, somehow, I was running, running, running . . .

I woke up sick and shaking, the sweat pouring down my face. For a moment I thought a great hammering on the door had awakened me, but then I realized that it was only

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the beating of my heart, thundering and pounding so that it seemed to shake the room.

Well, I have told you before that I am a strong woman, not given to nerves and fancies. Linda is the one who suffers from that sort of thing, not me. Time and again in her childhood I had to go to her in the night and soothe her off to sleep again after some wild dream. But for *me*, a grown woman, who never in her life has feared anyone or run away from anything—for *me* to wake up weak and shaking like a baby from some childish nightmare! I shook it off angrily, got out of my chair and fetched my papers, and as far as I can remember, worked on the Girls' Brigade accounts far into the night.

I thought no more about it until, perhaps a week later, the same thing happened again. The same sort of rainy evening, the same coming home unusually tired—and then the same dream. Well, not quite the same. This time Linda wasn't painting; she was on hands and knees, staining the floor or something of the sort. And there were no footsteps. This time nothing happened at all; only there was a sense of evil, of brooding hatred, which seemed to fill the little house. Somehow I felt it to be focused on the little figure kneeling in its gaily patterned work-apron. The hatred seemed to thicken round her—I could feel giant waves of it converging on her, mounting silently, silkily, till they hung poised above her head in ghastly, silent strength. Again I tried to scream a warning; again no sound came; and again I woke, weak and trembling, in my chair.

This time I was really worried. The tie between Linda and me is very close—closer, I think, than the tie between Linda and her mother could ever have been. Common-sense sort of person though I am, I could not help wondering whether these dreams were not some kind of warning. Should I call her, and ask if everything was all right?

I scolded myself for the very idea! I mustn't give way to such foolish, hysterical fancies—I have always prided myself on letting Linda lead her own life, and not smothering her with possessive anxiety as her mother would have surely done.

Stop! I mustn't keep speaking of Linda's mother like this—of Angela, my own sister. Angela has been dead many years now, and whatever wrong I may have suffered from her once has all been forgotten and forgiven years ago—I am not a woman to harbor grievances. But, of course, all this business of Linda's approaching marriage was bound to bring it back to me in a way. I couldn't help remembering that I, too, was once preparing a little house for my marriage, that Richard had once looked into my eyes as John now looks into Linda's.

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Well, I suppose most old maids have some ancient, and usually boring, love story hidden somewhere in their pasts, and I don't think mine will interest you much—it doesn't even interest me after all these years, so I will tell it as briefly as I can.

When I fell in love with Richard I was already 28, tall and angular, and a schoolteacher in the bargain. So it seemed to me a miracle that he, so handsome, so gay and charming, should love me in return and ask me to marry him. Our only difficulty was that my parents were both dead and I was the sole support of my younger sister, Angela. We talked it over, and decided to wait a year, until Angela had left school and could support herself.

But at the end of the year it appeared that Angela had set her heart on a musical career. Tearfully she begged me to see her through her first two years at college, after that, she was sure she could fend for herself.

Well, Richard was difficult this time, and I suppose one can hardly blame him. He accused me of caring more for my sister than for him, of making myself a doormat, and much else that I forget. But at last it was agreed to wait the two years, and meantime to work and save for a home together.

And work and save we did. By the end of the two years we had bought a little house, and we spent our evenings decorating and putting finishing touches to it, just as Linda and John are doing now.

Then came another blow. Angela failed in her exams. Again I was caught up in the old conflict; Richard angry and obstinate, Angela tearful and beseeching me to give her one more chance, for only six months this time. Once again I agreed, stipulating that this time would really be the last. To my surprise, after his first outburst, Richard became quite reasonable about it; and soon after that he was sent away on a series of business trips, so that we saw much less of each other.

Then, one afternoon at the end of May, not long before the six months were up, something happened. I was sitting on the lawn correcting papers when Angela came out of the house and walked slowly toward me. I remember noticing how sweetly pretty she looked with her flaxen hair and big blue eyes—just like Linda's now. The spring sunshine seemed to light up the delicacy of her too-pale skin, making it seem rare and lovely. She sat down on the grass beside me without speaking, and something in her silence made me lay down my pen.

"What is it, Angela?" I said. "Is anything the matter?"

She looked up at me then, her blue eyes full of childish defiance, and a sort of pride.

"Yes," she said. "I'm going to have a baby." She paused, looking

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me full in the face. "Richard's baby."

I didn't say anything. I don't even remember feeling anything. Even then, I suppose, I was a strong-minded person, who did not allow her feelings to run away with her. Angela was still talking.

"And it's no use blaming *us,* Madge," she was saying. "What do you expect, after you've kept him dangling all these years?"

I remember the papers in front of me, dazzling-white in the May sunshine. One of the children had written "Nappoleon"—like that, with two p's—over and over again in her theme. There must have been half a dozen of them just on the one page. I felt I would go mad if I had to go on looking at them, so I took my pen and crossed them out, one after another, in red ink. Even to this day I have a foolish feeling that I would go mad if I ever saw "Nappoleon" spelled like that again.

I felt as if a long time had passed, and Angela must have got up and gone away ages ago; but no, there she was, still talking.

"Well, *you* may not care, Madge," she was saying. "I don't suppose you'd stop correcting your old papers if the world blew up. But what about *me?* What am I to *do?*"

"Do?" I said gently. "Why, Richard must marry you, of course. I'll talk to him myself."

Well, they were married, and Linda was born, a delicate, sickly little thing, weighing barely five pounds. Angela, too, was poorly. She had been terribly nervous and ill during her pregnancy and took a long time to recover; and it was tacitly agreed that there should be no more children. A pity, because I knew Richard would have liked a large family. Strange how I, a strong, healthy woman who could have raised half a dozen children without turning a hair, should have been denied the chance, while poor sickly Angela . . .

Ah, well, that is life. And I suppose my maternal feelings were largely satisfied by caring for delicate little Linda—it seemed only natural that when first her father and then Angela died the little orphan should come and live with me. And indeed I loved her dearly. She was my poor sister's child as well as Richard's, and my only fear has been that I may love her too deeply, too possessively, and so cramp her freedom.

Perhaps this fear is unfounded. Anyway, it was this that prevented me from lifting the telephone receiver then and there on that rainy September night, dialing her number, and asking if all was well. If I had done so, would it have made any difference in what followed? Could I have checked the march of tragedy, then and there, when I woke from that second dream?

I didn't know. I still don't know. All I know is that as I sat there in the silent room, listening to the rain

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beating against my windows out of the night, my fears somehow became clearer—came into focus, as it were. I knew now, with absolute certainty, that what I feared had something to do with Linda's forthcoming marriage, her marriage to John Barlow.

But what could it be? What *could* I be afraid of? He was such a pleasant, ordinary young man, from a respected local family; he had a good job; he loved Linda deeply. Well, he seemed to. And yet, as I thought about it, as I remembered the uneasiness I always felt in his presence, it occurred to me that this uneasiness—this anxiety for Linda's safety—was always at its height when he made some gesture of affection toward her—a light caress, perhaps—a quick, intimate glance across a crowded room . . .

Common sense. Common sense has been my ally throughout life, and I called in its aid now.

"There is nothing wrong!" I said aloud. "There is nothing wrong with this young man!"

And then I went to bed.

It must have been nearly three weeks later when I had the dream again. I had seen Linda in the meantime and she seemed as well and happy as I have ever known her. The only cloud on her horizon was that for the next fortnight John would be working late, and so they wouldn't be able to spend the evenings painting and carpentering together in the new house.

"But I'll go on by myself, Auntie," she assured me. "I want to start on the woodwork in that front room tonight. Pale green, we thought, to go with the pale yellow . . ." She chattered on, happily and gaily, seeming to make nonsense of my fears.

"It sounds lovely, dear," I said. "Don't knock yourself out, though, working too hard."

For Linda *does* get tired easily. In spite of the thirty years difference in our age I can always outpace her on our long rambles over the hill, and arrive home fresh and vigorous while she is sometimes quite white with exhaustion.

"No, Auntie, don't worry," she said, standing on tiptoe to kiss me—she is such a little thing; "I won't get tired. I'm so happy I don't think I'll ever get tired again!"

Reassuring enough, you'd have thought. And yet, somehow, it didn't reassure me. Her very happiness—even the irrelevant fact that John would be working late—seemed somehow to add to the intangible peril I could feel gathering round her.

And three nights later I dreamed the dream again.

This time she was alone in the little house. I don't know how I knew it with such certainty in the dream, but I did—her aloneness seemed to fill the unfurnished rooms with echoes. *She* seemed nervous, too. She was no longer painting with the absorbed concen-

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tration of my previous dreams, but jerkily, uncertainly. She kept starting, turning round, listening; and I, hovering somewhere on the stairs as before, seemed to be listening too.

Listening for what? For the fear which I knew was creeping like fog into the little house? Or for something more?

"It's a dream!" I tried to scream, with soundless lips. "Don't be afraid, Linda, it's only a dream! I've had it before, I'll wake up soon! It's all right, I'm waking right now, I can hear the banging—"

I started awake in my chair, bolt upright, deafened by the now familiar thumping of my heart.

But was it my heart? Could that imperious knocking, which shook the house, be merely my heart? The knocking became interspersed with a frantic ringing of the bell. This was no dream.

I staggered to my feet and somehow got down the passage to the front door and flung it open. There in the rainy night was Linda, wild and white and disheveled, flinging herself into my arms.

"Oh, Auntie, Auntie, I thought you were out—asleep—I couldn't make you hear—I rang and rang . . ."

I soothed her as best I could. I took her into the kitchen and made her a cup of the weak thin tea she loves, and heard her story.

And after all it wasn't much of a story. Just that she had gone to the new house as usual after work, and had settled down to painting the front room. For a while, she said, she had worked quite happily, and then suddenly she had heard a sound—a shuffling sound—so faint that she might almost have imagined it.

"And that was all, really, Auntie," she said, looking up at me, shamefaced. "But somehow it frightened me so. I ought to have gone and looked round the house, but I didn't dare. I tried to go on working, but from then on there was such an awful feeling—I can't describe it—as if there was something evil in the house, something close behind me, waiting to get its hands round my throat. Oh, Auntie, I know it sounds silly. It's the kind of thing I used to dream when I was a little girl. Do you remember?"

Indeed I did remember. I took her on my lap and soothed her now just as I had done then, when she was a little sobbing girl, awake and frightened in the depth of the night.

And then I told her she must go home.

"Auntie!" she protested. "But, Auntie, can't I stay here with you for the night? That's why I came. I *must* stay!"

But I was adamant. I can't tell you why, but some instinct warned me that, come what may, she must not stay here tonight. Whatever fear

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or danger might be elsewhere, they could never be as great as they would be here, in this house, tonight.

So I made her go home, to her lodgings in the town. I couldn't explain it to her, or even to myself. In vain she protested that the last bus had gone, that her old room here was ready for her. But I was inflexible. I rang up a taxi, and as it disappeared with her round the corner of the lane, casting a weird radiance behind it, I heaved a great sigh of relief, as if a great task had been accomplished—as if I had just dragged her to shore out of a dark and stormy sea.

The next morning I found that my instinct had not been without foundation. There *had* been danger lurking round my house the night before. For when I went to get my bicycle to go and help about the Mothers' Outing, I found it in its usual place in the shed, but the tires and mudguard were spattered with a kind of thick yellow clay. There is no clay like that anywhere between here and the village. Where could it have come from? Who had been riding my bicycle through unfamiliar mud in the rain and wind last night? Who had put it back silently in the shed, and as silently gone away?

As I stood there, bewildered and shaken, the telephone rang indoors. It was Linda, and she sounded tense, distraught.

"Auntie, will you do something for me? Will you come with me to the house tonight and stay there while I do the painting and—sort of keep watch for me? I expect you'll think it's silly, but I *know* there was somebody there last night—and I'm frightened. Will you come, Auntie?"

There could be only one answer. I got through my day's work as fast as I could and by six o'clock I was waiting for Linda on the steps of her office. As we hurried through the darkening streets Linda was apologetic.

"I know it's awfully silly, Auntie, but John's still working late, and he doesn't even know if he'll finish in time to come and fetch me. I feel scared there without him. And the upstairs lights won't go on again—John hasn't had time to see the electrician about it yet—and it's so dark and lonely. Do you think someone really *was* there last night, Auntie?"

I didn't tell her about the mud on my bicycle. There seemed no point in alarming her further. Besides, what was there to tell? There was no reason to suppose it had any connection—

"Watch out, Auntie, it's terribly muddy along this bit where the builders have been."

I stared down at the thick yellow clay already clinging heavily to my shoes; and straight in front of us, among a cluster of partially finished red-brick houses, stood Linda's future home. It stared at us with its little empty windows out

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of the October dusk. A light breeze rose, but stirred nothing in that wilderness of mud, raw brickwork, and scaffolding. Linda and I hesitated, looked at each other.

"Come on," I said, and a minute later we were in the empty house.

We arranged that she should settle down to her painting in the downstairs front room just as if she were alone, and I was to sit on the stairs, near the top, where I could command a view of both upstairs and down. If anyone should come in, by either the front or back door, I should see them before they could reach Linda.

I was very quiet as I sat there in the darkness. The light streamed out of the downstairs room where Linda was working, and I could see her through the open door, with her back to me, just as she had been in my dream. How like poor Angela she was, with her pale hair and her white, fragile neck! She was working steadily now, absorbed, confident—reassured, I suppose, by my presence in the house.

As I sat there, I could feel the stair behind me pressing a little into my spine—a strangely familiar pressure. My whole pose indeed seemed familiar—every muscle seemed to fall into place, as if by long practice, as I sat there, half leaning against the banisters, staring down into the glare of light.

And then, suddenly, I knew. I knew who had cycled in black hatred through the rainy darkness and the yellow mud. I knew who had waited here, night after night, watching Linda as a cat watches a mouse. I knew what horror was closing in even now on this poor fragile child, on this sickly, puny brat who had kept *my* lovely, sturdy children from coming into the world—the sons and daughters *I* could have given Richard, tall and strong—the children he should have had—the children *I* could have borne him.

I was creeping downstairs now, on tiptoe, in my stockinged feet, with a light, almost prancing movement, yet silent as a shadow. I could see my hands clutching in front of me like a lobster's claws, itching for the feel of her white neck.

At the foot of the stairs now—at the door of the room—and still she worked on, her back to me, oblivious.

I tried to cry out, to warn her. "She's coming, Linda!" I tried to scream: "I can see her hands clawing behind you!" But no sound came from my drawn-back lips, no sound from my swift light feet.

Then, just as in my dream, there were footsteps through the house, quick and loud, a man's footsteps, hurrying, running, rushing—rushing to save Linda, to save us both.

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START FROM SCRATCH

by JEROME L. JOHNSON

IT WAS A WARM, SLUSHY SPRING DAY in Minneapolis. I stood in an alley just off Lake Street, staring at the remains of Bill Fischer, who had been my friend, my working partner, and a very good cop. He was lying on his back among several battered garbage cans and there were two huge blood spots on his broad chest.

Even harder to look at was his face. A vicious cut ran from his left ear down his neck, and a shorter slash ran from the right side of his mouth down his chin. The blood had spread over his face and dried there.

Captain Benson was standing beside me. "God," he said, "it's awful. Any ideas, O'Hara?"

"None. No witnesses, no clues."

"How about the knife?"

"We haven't turned it up." I knelt down and examined Bill's right hand. "This hand is bruised, Captain. Looks like Bill got in a few licks."

He cleared his throat. "You want to tell his family, or should I?"

"I'll do it," I said. "I'll go out to

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the school now and talk to Billy."

I drove out to Jefferson High, one of those sprawling new suburban schools with acres of space for athletic fields and parking. I left my car in the bus zone, trudged through the slush, and entered the building. Bill Fischer, Junior, was football coach and teacher of senior social studies at Jefferson. Everyone called him "Billy," to distinguish father from son.

We sat opposite one another in the principal's office, Mr. Beach having vacated it for our use and hustled off in search of a substitute teacher.

You expect strength from a big man like Billy, and he showed plenty. He was white-faced and obviously grief-stricken, but he didn't break down. He asked for the details.

"He never showed up this morning, Billy. Left no message, didn't call in. A patrol unit found him at about ten o'clock." I described the two stab wounds in his chest.

He rubbed his chin. "Anything else?" he asked.

I hesitated, but finally told him about the ugly facial and neck cuts. It had been a horrible thing to see, and was even worse to describe. I demonstrated the wounds by tracing my forefinger along the same parts of my face and neck. "Also," I added, "his right hand was bruised. Probably happened during the struggle."

His deep-blue eyes still fixed on me, he took a little time for thought. Looking at him, I remembered the chubby, rosy-cheeked little towhead who had grown into a huge aggressive linebacker at the University. A back injury had ended his professional career, but he was doing well as a coach and teacher. Now, I noticed, the son had come to resemble the father a great deal. That massive physique was spreading, the wavy blond hair was thinning, and the rosiness of his cheeks had suffused into a general facial ruddiness.

He asked me what leads we had, but I didn't have much to tell him. We had been trying to crack a narcotics ring, and it was possible that an anonymous tip had sent my partner into an ambush that morning. I told Billy, as an afterthought, that this was just the kind of case his father had been best at—starting from scratch, with no definite clues.

"Yes," Billy mused, "Dad was a good cop."

Neither of us spoke for some time. It was something like that minute of silence they observe in ballparks after a great athlete has passed away. Billy finally shook off his memories and got up.

"Dave," he said, "thanks for bringing me the message yourself. It was probably as hard on you as it was on me."

"It'll be even harder on your mother," I reminded him. "Want me to go with you when you tell her?"

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He considered. "No," he decided, "I'll go home first and tell Emmy, and she can go with me to Ma's."

"Okay. Do you want to see him, Billy?"

"Yes, of course. Later this afternoon?"

"Maybe," I suggested, "you should wait until they—you know, fix up his face a little."

He shook his head. "No, I particularly want to see those slashes. I don't know why, exactly—but I want to see them."

At a little after four that afternoon Billy and I walked out of the city morgue and stood in the sunlight on the concrete steps. A chilly breeze had come up, but we didn't notice it. Billy's face was gray.

"Dave," he said, "I can't figure it out. Why would anyone take the time and trouble to do that to his face?"

"I don't know. A cop has enemies. Maybe they enjoyed doing it."

"How do you figure the bruised hand?"

"Well," I suggested, "his gun was found about fifteen feet away. There were signs of a struggle. I think they had to smash his hand to force the gun out of it."

He nodded. "Do you have a new partner yet, Dave?"

"No," I said, "the captain wants me to look around on my own for a while. He thinks there's a possible connection between your dad's death and our narcotics investigation. Wants me to double-check all the people we've talked to before."

"Mind if I tag along?" His blue eyes were begging.

"Billy," I hedged, "the last thing your dad wanted you to be was a cop."

"It isn't that. This is a personal thing."

"What about your job?"

"It'll keep. Just for a few days, Dave?"

So, I thought, the cop hadn't died after all. His spirit persisted in this hulking young man.

"Okay," I said. "But it's unofficial, remember that."

"I will."

"And promise me something else. Don't go snooping around on your own. You get an idea, tell me. I don't want you getting hurt, too. Agreed?"

"Agreed."

On Wednesday afternoon, two days after the killing, Bill Fischer was laid to rest. It might have been a great day for criminals in our area, but I doubted that they were relishing it. They knew that the intensity of our search for a cop killer would raise hell with their operations. I was just one of many hands on that long arm of the law that was covering the metropolitan area. I was a busy hand, but I didn't seem to be grasping much.

Billy pleased me by not being a nuisance. In fact, he helped in my interrogations by representing a

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kind of scare tactic. He hovered silently in the background, watching the faces of the various people being questioned. It almost had the effect of Bill Fischer's ghost rising to seek vengeance for his own murder. Billy's presence made the suspects nervous enough to tell whatever they knew. Unfortunately, no one seemed to know anything.

George Schafer, a greasy punk who ran his tainted enterprises from a small office behind a laundry on Chicago Avenue, responded typically.

"New cop?" he sneered, eyeing Billy warily.

"You know who he is. He wants to know who killed his old man."

"Don't ask me. I didn't have nothin' to do with it."

"Bill Fischer was leaning on you pretty hard, Schafer. You look like a prime suspect to me."

"He had nothin' on me. You got no right bringin' that big lug in here threatening me, O'Hara. I didn't kill him."

"Who did?"

"How should I know?"

"If you do," I told him, "it would be smart to tell us. You don't want us on your back, do you?"

He was angry, but he was also scared. "Listen, I didn't do nothin', and I don't know nothin'. Now get that big bruiser outa here!"

Not even our most reliable informers could give us a lead. Lenny Karbo, the best of them, offered nothing but sympathy when I reached him by telephone.

"Jeez, O'Hara," he muttered. "I was sorry to hear it. Fischer was a good cop. And what they did to his face! Jeez!"

"Lenny, what have you heard?"

"Nothing. No lie, O'Hara, I ain't heard a thing."

"No ideas at all?"

"Jeez, I wouldn't hold out on you. But I'll tell you one thing. I feel sorry for that guy when you catch him."

"Oh? Why?"

"You know Fischer's kid, that big palooka who used to play for the Gophers?"

"Yeah, I know him."

"Well, between him and you—! Jeez, I feel sorry for the guy that did it!"

On Tuesday of the next week the chief called a meeting of captains and detectives to review the findings in the Fischer case. It was reported that area policy had logged several thousand man-hours investigating the murder. Scores of known and suspected criminals had been interrogated, with special attention given to knife artists, junkies, and people who'd had run-ins with Bill Fischer. But not a single witness had come forward and no further evidence had been found on the scene of the crime. Net results: zero.

The case was turned over to Homicide, with all other investigating officers returning to their old as-

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signments. I got a special dispensation, however. The captain teamed me with Jablonski, a sharp young homicide expert. It was time to send Billy back to school.

"After all," I argued, "what the hell are those kids learning from a substitute teacher?"

He was reluctant. "They couldn't learn much from me these days," he growled. We were sitting in the courthouse coffee shop, and I noted that his appetite was still good as he wolfed down a stack of iced doughnuts.

"Listen," he said, stopping in the middle of a bite, "do me one more favor, will you?"

"If I can."

"Give me Lenny Karbo's phone number."

"What for? If he found out anything, he'd call me."

"I just want to ask him something."

"Lenny's my best stoolie," I said. "You aren't going to intimidate him, are you? Or push him around?"

"No, I just want to ask him a question."

I gave him the number, then went off to join Jablonski, assuming that my future dealings with Billy Fischer would only be social ones. No, I didn't get in touch with Lenny. If Billy wanted me to know anything, he'd tell me.

But our next meeting was no social event, despite the fact that it took place in a bar on East Henepin. I made my way through a circle of light in the center of the room, spotted Billy waving from a booth in the semidarkness, and went back to join him.

"Okay," I said, "what's up?"

"I didn't get you out of bed, did I?" He spoke in the sly, teasing tone he had used so much in the old days, before his father was killed.

"That's all right," I said. "I had to get up to answer the phone anyway."

He grinned, I think. It was a little too dark to tell.

"Well," he announced, "I think I've found him. Or rather, somebody found him for me."

"The killer?"

"Yes."

"Who found him for you? Lenny?"

He hesitated. "Yes, Lenny helped. He told me where to look for him. And the bartender told me *when* to look for him."

"And when is that?"

He looked at the lighted dial on the clock behind the bar. "He comes in here most nights between eleven thirty and twelve."

"All right," I said, "it's now ten minutes past eleven. You have at least twenty minutes to tell me what the hell you're talking about."

"Okay," he said, keeping an eye on the door. "You mentioned, you'll remember, that Dad used to be good at solving this kind of case —'starting from scratch,' you called

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it. Well, I began to wonder just how *he* would go about solving this particular case, and a strange thought struck me: maybe he *did*."

"Did what?"

"Start from scratch," he said grimly.

The door swung open, and Billy stiffened.

"He's early tonight," Billy said.

I turned and looked. The man walking in was tall and skinny and shabbily dressed, with a nervous, hunted look. I knew him. I had never seen him before, but I knew him by the scars on his face. One ran from his left ear down his neck, the other from the right side of his mouth down his chin. He was growing a beard, but it hadn't sprouted where the scars were. Instead, it emphasized them.

The man perched himself cautiously on a bar stool and ordered a drink. The bartender served him and, after a glance at us, disappeared. I reached for my revolver, motioning Billy to sit still.

"Wait," he whispered. "I've got an idea."

Before I could stop him he had stepped from the semidarkness into the light. The man, sensing his looming presence, turned around sharply.

"Hello, killer," Billy said.

It was the scare tactic, the vengeance-seeking ghost; and it worked. The killer, sensing danger, panicked. He lunged at Billy, his knife flashing, but the former linebacker sidestepped, giving me a clear shot. The bullet hit the man in the right shoulder, causing him to spin around and drop the knife. He made a motion to go for it, but Billy's crunching block hurled him to the floor at least six feet beyond the knife. I followed, covering him with my revolver.

"I'm a police officer," I told him. "You're under arrest."

"Okay, okay," he groaned. "Just keep him offa me!"

It is not true, as his defense later contended, that I coerced his confession by threatening to turn him over to Billy. On the other hand, I don't recall telling him I would *not* do so. At any rate, he was frightened enough to tell us the whole story.

He was a transient named Dawson. Sleeping off a drunk in the alley that morning, he was suddenly roused by a big determined-looking cop. He panicked, pulled his knife, and the next moment he had plunged it into Bill Fischer's chest.

"Sure," I said. "Then you stabbed him in the chest again and casually carved up his face. What kind of a monster are you, anyway?"

"I didn't carve his face," he insisted. "He done it himself!"

I looked at Billy. He did not appear to be surprised.

Dawson was watching him, too. "Listen," he said, "I didn't know what to do. He's laying there dy-

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ing, with my knife in him. That's bad enough. Then he gets hold of the knife and pulls it out. I thought he was gonna throw it at me or something, but he starts cutting his own face with it! Then I see what he's up to. Cripes, it was like drawing a picture of me! What could I do?"

What he did, of course, was to kick the knife away from Bill, finish him off, and flee with the weapon. The gun, apparently, had dropped during the struggle and Dawson hadn't taken the time to look for it—he was too anxious to get away.

Later I said to Billy, "Your dad was even a better cop than I thought."

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Cleeve, Brian	YOU MUST NEVER GO BACK	Random House	4.95	11/8
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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 325th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine . . . another "first" by a teen-ager (God bless 'em!) coming less than two years after Dennis Dubin's "Elroy Quinn's Last Case" (July 1967). It is always a particularly happy event to welcome young blood to the circulatory system of the mystery story. (Now, let's have no talk about varicose veins: the mystery genre shows no sign whatever of hardening of the arteries!)

At the time Josh Pachter wrote "E.Q. Griffen Earns His Name," he was 16 years old, a junior at General Douglas MacArthur High School in Levittown, New York. (He is now a senior at Half Hollow Hills High School in Dix Hills, Huntington, New York.) The young author wrote: "My reigning passion is reading detective stories. Come to think of it, 'reading' is not the right word—I just eat *them. In fact, you might say that I'm addicted to the Queen's English; a Carr-nivore who Wolfes down every mystery I can get my Stout little hands on."*

Josh Pachter's chosen field is journalism, and he'd like to attend Columbia University. When not "eating detective stories," he bowls (a high of 229 at the time of this writing), trap- or skeetshoots, golfs, or works on his collection of Kuwaitian (!) postage stamps.

It should come as no surprise that Josh plans to continue with the characters in his first story—Inspector Ross Griffen and his eleven children, all named after detective heroes (and one heroine)—and has already "roughed out" plots for Gideon Fell Griffen (who solves a locked car *murder) and Augustus Van Dusen Griffen (who solves a case in less than ten seconds after hearing the details). Personally, we can't wait!*

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E.Q. GRIFFEN EARNS HIS NAME

by JOSH PACHTER

FOR THE THIRD TIME IN AS MANY minutes Ellery Queen removed his horn-rimmed glasses (they just don't *make* good pince-nez any more), and carefully polished the lenses.

"Shades of Circe!" he muttered. "How can I be so abysmally dense?"

Ellery's vexation stemmed from his total inability to find the solution to a mystery which even John Hamish Watson would have been able to see through without the benefit of a second glance. But: "It's there," E.Q. groaned, "if only I knew what it was!"

"My goodness, Ellery," a feminine voice intruded, "don't tell me our little problem has got you talking to yourself?"

With a moan of embarrassment and despair the great detective fled the room.

"That Alison Field," he thought, as he paced the sidewalk in front of the Fields' home. "Why can't she realize that being a detective is not as easy as it seems in books. It's hard work! I just *wish* I could show her."

Ellery Queen's last name was Griffen, and he was 16 years old.

About an hour before his hasty departure from the Fields' kitchen, Ellery had received a frantic telephone call from Mrs. Leora Field. "Ellery," she had said, "is anybody else home? Well, then, could *you* come over please? Right away!"

When Ellery had arrived, the woman led him into her kitchen and pointed a trembling finger at an open window. "They're gone! Do something, Ellery, they're gone!"

"What's gone?" the boy asked sensibly.

"My pies!" she shrieked. "My beautiful pies!"

Finally the story came out. Leora Field had spent that day baking three large apple pies for a church bazaar to be held the next afternoon. Later she had taken Alison, her only child, to a dental appointment, leaving the pies on the window sill to cool. When she returned, the pies were missing.

Ellery's investigation had uncovered only one clue: an Italian postage stamp which he found lying face down just beneath the window. The stamp was golden brown and dark brown, and had been issued in 1964—Ellery had looked it up in his Scott's Catalogue. The design of the stamp illustrated Italian sports.

Ellery reflected, and decided that there were only four people known to him who could possibly be connected with foreign postage stamps: Charles Green, who owned

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the local stamp shop; Greg Zorn, a boy of Ellery's age who worked at Green's store every day after school; and two stamp collectors —Al Williams and Steve Holden. Steve's mother was in charge of the church bazaar.

Even though the Italian stamp seemed to be the only clue, Ellery simply could not figure out how to eliminate any of his suspects. A few phone calls established that not one of the four had an alibi for the crime period. And now Alison Field was needling him.

Suddenly a cry split the quiet, late-afternoon air: "ELLERY! *ELLERY!*" It was the detective's mother and, relieved, he trotted off toward home and dinner. Something will hit me sooner or later, he thought.

The greatest compliment which a Griffen child could receive was to be told that he had "earned his name."

Inspector Ross Griffen, of the Tyson County Police Force, had grown up on a rich diet of detective fiction and, in respectful memory of Sherlock Holmes, Hercule Poirot, Arsène Lupin, Bulldog Drummond, and the other heroes of his youth, he had named each of his eleven children after one of them. And the Inspector had introduced his sons and daughter to the joys of detection at early ages, teaching them to use their minds and wits to the fullest advantage.

A Griffen earned his name when he was able to solve a criminal problem in the manner of his namesake. Although these problems were usually made up "round robin" at the dinner table, or read out of a book, the children had on several occasions used their detective powers to help solve cases which their father had brought home with him.

Jane Marple Griffen, Peter Wimsey Griffen, Albert Campion Griffen, and John Jericho Griffen had pointed out clues which led to the solutions of two burglaries and one case of arson. Parker Pyne Griffen, Gideon Fell Griffen, and Augustus Van Dusen Griffen had earned their names on make-believe crimes, while Sherlock Holmes, Perry Mason, and Nero Wolfe, being less than ten years of age, had understandably not yet shown much creativity.

Inspector Griffen's biggest disappointment was Ellery. Not that the boy didn't try; he was always advancing ingenious theories, but he always seemed to be wrong.

So when, that Thursday evening, his father sat down at the table with a singularly puzzled and abstracted look on his face, Ellery kept quiet about his own problem and asked, "What's up, Dad?"

"Not now, El," the Inspector answered. "I'll tell you about it after dinner."

But after dinner Griffen went into his study (a rare treat for a policeman with eleven children),

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and sat down with the phone. Hoping to get some information about their father's case, the Griffen children turned on the radio to an all-news station and listened. After the usual roundup of national and international news, the announcer delivered a local report:

"At an unknown time last night Collier's Jewelers, on South Firthson Avenue, under twenty-four hour high-security guard, was broken into and robbed of a $22,000 diamond necklace. Police investigation, led by Inspector Ross Griffen, has thus far failed to discover the identity of the thief or thieves, and how they managed to enter the building. The necklace was found missing this morning from a seemingly untouched display case by Geoffrey Collier, the store's owner and manager, during a routine search of the building. The police were immediately notified. Timothy Tierney, night guard, neither saw nor heard anything out of the ordinary last night. An intricate burglar alarm system failed to go off. For further information on last night's robbery of Collier's Jewelers, stay tuned to . . ."

At the mention of the name, Collier, Parker had sat up very straight and listened intently to the broadcast. At its conclusion he exclaimed, "Boy! Anyone clever enough to get into Collier's is really going to be tough to catch."

"What do you mean, Park?" Jane asked.

"You know my friend Dickie Albert? Well, his brother Paul works at that jewelry store, and Paul was telling Dick and me about it. That place is as safe as Fort Knox."

"If this is Dad's case," Ellery put in, "we'd better know the layout. How about describing it to us?"

"From what Paul Albert told me, old man Collier has that whole place set up with just one purpose in mind—not letting any merchandise out of the store until it's been paid for. And up to now he's done a good job of it, too. So far, there have been three burglary attempts, and each time the crooks were caught before they even got into the store.

"Here's the way it works. Every night, before closing up, Collier locks all the windows from the inside. There are bars over each window on the outside. He double-locks the back door, and then, with Tierney standing guard outside, Collier searches the entire building. After the search he double-locks the front door, gives the only duplicates of these two keys to Tierney, and leaves for home.

"When he comes back the next morning Tierney unlocks the front door, returns the keys, and then the two of them search the store together. There's a series of alarms covering both doors, all the windows, and all the showcases. Like I said, safe as Fort Knox."

"Obviously not," Albert commented drily.

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Augustus looked up from a magazine, yawned, and said, "It shouldn't require a Thinking Machine to inform you that, with all these precautions, it had to be an inside job."

Shaking his head, Parker replied, "I doubt it. According to Paul, Collier even put his porter through a strict security check. Believe me, anyone who can get a job at Collier's is one hundred percent honest. That guy Collier doesn't take any chances."

The study door opened, and Inspector Griffen walked out. He crossed the living room to his easy chair and dropped into it. Eyes closed, he slowly massaged his forehead. Finally he spoke: "All right, kids. If you still want to hear about it I'll tell you about this case."

"We kn-know most of the facts, D-d-dad," John Jericho stated. Unlike his tall redhaired namesake, John was short, dark, and occasionally spoke with a stutter. "How about if we just ask q-q-questions about the points we're not clear on?"

"Fine with me, son," the Inspector replied. "What would you like to know?"

"F-first of all, was the n-normal routine followed last night?"

"Yes, it was; everything as usual —windows and doors locked, et cetera."

"And the necklace was definitely in the case when Collier left?" Jane asked.

The Inspector nodded, then elaborated. "It's by far the most valuable piece in the store, and Collier checks it just before he leaves. He's sure it was there last night."

Gideon, lost in thought until this time, now looked up and said, "I rather think you've been ignoring the obvious. What about this man Tierney? People have gone rotten for less than twenty-two thousand. Money's the motive, the keys are the means, and Tierney had opportunity all last night."

"Collier stands by Tierney and every one of his other employees, but we're having them all checked out anyway. I've got Captain Harris, my best man, on it, and I should be hearing from him any minute."

"I could explain this 'miracle' two other ways," continued Gideon, neither a doctor nor fat, but hoping to be the first and trying to stall off being the second. "Tierney could be innocent, but he could have left his post for a while—to get a beer, say—or even have dozed off for just long enough."

"I'll have all that information soon," the Inspector said.

Albert spoke up: "Of course, the burglar alarms were on all last night? No signs of tampering, nothing out of order?"

"Nothing," his father said. "There's a bell-and-light hookup at headquarters. If the alarm is tripped, or tampered with, the bell goes off, and if there is any internal malfunction the light starts flashing."

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"What about those window bars?" Augustus asked.

"If I understand what you're asking, son, then the answer is 'no.' Not even a circus midget could have passed through those bars. In fact, I think it would be safe to say that whoever got into Collier's Jewelers had a harder time than Professor Van Dusen had getting out of Cell 13."

A silence followed, shattered after some seconds by the ringing of the phone. Nero Wolfe Griffen rose, according to custom, and crossed into the kitchen. He picked up the receiver, and thanks to the long cord was able to carry it back to his father.

"Hello, Griffen speaking . . . yeah, Harris . . . all of them? . . . all night, huh . . . okay, thanks a lot." Inspector Griffen handed the phone back to his son, who walked once more to the kitchen.

Wolfe cradled the phone.

"Well, kids, that seems to let out Tierney," the Inspector said. "Harris is convinced the night guard is completely innocent, and that he didn't leave his post all last night."

Inspector Griffen's eyes swept the room tiredly, then came to rest on Ellery. "What about you, El?" he asked, "I haven't heard you say a word so far. Have you got any questions?"

"Just one, Dad," Ellery responded slowly. "Whose fingerprints were found on the rifled display case?"

The Inspector looked startled, and replied, "It's funny you should ask that. We dusted every inch of that case, and it looks, according to what we found, like it just wasn't touched. Every print on it belonged there; there were no strange ones. Not a single area had been wiped off. And gloves seem to be out. Although wearing gloves will eliminate fingerprints, the gloves themselves leave marks or smudges on most materials; not traceable to any particular pair, of course, but identifiable as having been made by gloves. That help you any, Ellery?"

"It might."

Inspector Griffen stood up. "Kids," he said, "I'm due back at headquarters at eight, and it's now seven thirty. Unless there are any suggestions, I'll leave now."

There were suggestions.

Jane said, "This reminds me of an incident which occurred back in high school when Violet Bronson, a beautiful girl with deep blue—"

And Parker said, "The crime was obviously committed by some poor misguided—"

And Gideon said, "With all the doors and windows locked—"

And Augustus S. F. X. Van Dusen said, "Logically—"

And then, wonder of wonders, Ellery said, "I know the answer."

Inspector Griffen sat down heavily, breathed deeply, and listened to the silence. Finally he managed to ask, "What?"

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"I said," Ellery repeated, "'I know the answer.' And I do. Not only do I know who robbed Collier's, but I know how and why."

"You're sure?" the Inspector asked incredulously.

Ellery pulled off his glasses and thought for a moment. Suddenly he nodded and said, "Yes, I'm sure."

"Then tell us, son."

"Of course. There are," he began, "two major possibilities in which this crime could have been committed without leaving a single fingerprint, mark, or clue. The first is that the lack of clues was caused by the lack of a crime—that is, the necklace was not stolen at all, was merely mislaid."

"But we—" his father interrupted.

"Don't interrupt," Wolfe grumbled.

Ellery continued: "But we can eliminate this possibility because a thorough police search failed to turn up the gems. Besides, they were definitely seen by Mr. Collier when he made his rounds last night.

"You especially, Sherlock, should know that 'when you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth.' So eliminating our first possibility indicates that the second one must be the truth. But before we discuss that, let's consider the ways in which the thief could have entered the store to commit the robbery.

"The front of Collier's," Ellery went on, "is guarded by Timothy Tierney, who has been found to be one hundred percent trustworthy. He remained at his post all night, making entry through the front impossible. There are other stores on both sides of the jewelry store, but with no connecting doors or partitions. The back windows were locked and barred, and found to have been undisturbed. The same goes for the back door, so rear entry can also be ruled out. I've been in the store, and I know that there are no other ways in—no fire escape, no skylight, no chimney. And we can't forget the burglar alarms—ready to go off at any intrusion.

"These facts all boil down to this: *there is no way that anyone could have entered Collier's after closing and stolen that necklace!*

"But since we have established that it *was* stolen, then the theft must have occurred *before* closing.

"Could the thief have taken the necklace and left before the building was closed up? No; Collier saw it before he closed up.

"Could he have hidden in the building until after closing, stolen the jewels, and then left? Or waited until morning, managing to escape during the confusion of discovery of the theft? No again; he would have been discovered by Collier's nightly search. And don't forget, no strange fingerprints were found on the display case."

"I've got it!" Jane cried. "Vickie

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Harding did the same thing up at the University. You know Vickie, Ellery. She's that cute girl with the long blonde—"

"Get to the point, Jane!" Peter, the oldest, snapped.

The Griffens' only girl blushed. "Oh, yes. Sorry. I do ramble so. Anyway, one day last semester Vickie forgot to bring her lunch to class. Rather than ask me for a loan, so that she could buy something in the cafeteria, she sneaked one of my sandwiches out of my lunch bag, leaving some crumpled-up paper in its place, so that I wouldn't notice anything missing until much later. Of course I easily deduced that Vickie had taken the sandwich, and confronted her. She broke down and confessed. I forgave her, and we've been the best of friends ever since."

"And just how does that help?" Parker sneered.

Jane looked at her younger brother furiously and continued, "Obviously the same thing happened here. The thief took the necklace before the store closed, leaving a paste replica in its place. Then, when Collier made his search, he thought the genuine necklace was still there!"

Parker clapped his hands with glee and pounced. "And just what happened to this 'replica'," he demanded. "Did it get up and walk away? Or did the successful diamond thief decide to come back later and steal the fake, too?"

Jane's mouth fell open.

"May I continue?" Ellery asked politely. "This brings us back to the second possibility—that the theft was committed before, not after, Collier's Jewelers was closed for the night.

"The biggest question still is: How was that necklace stolen without leaving either fingerprints or marks or smudges on the display case?

"But isn't it possible that we've been looking at this point from the wrong angle; that the thief's prints *are* on the case, and that we just didn't recognize them as belonging to the crook? In other words, that this *was* an inside job after all.

"Assuming this to be true, the theft must have been committed *after* Mr. Collier looked into the case, but *before* the thief left the building."

Breaking his silence, Inspector Griffen said, "But, Ellery, Collier always conducts his search after all store personnel have already left."

"Exactly!" Ellery exclaimed triumphantly. "So it should be as clear as daylight that the thief was—"

"C-C-Collier!" John Jericho yelled.

"It's not too uncommon an occurrence," Inspector Griffen explained at breakfast the next morning. The jewelry store owner had confessed, and the stolen necklace was now resting in a police safe.

"Collier had been backing a risky stock too heavily, and his firm was bankrupt. The brokers were press-

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ing him to pay the large balance of his account, and he needed cash in a hurry. So Collier stole his own jewels, expecting to collect their full value from his insurance company, plus another five to ten thousand dollars by selling the diamonds through a fence."

"How did he manage it, Dad?" Albert asked.

"I told you that Collier and Tierney search the store together every morning, but Collier conducts the evening search by himself, with Tierney on guard outside. So it was easy for him to unlock the display case, slip the necklace into his pocket, and then relock the case. He probably figured that even though Tierney had passed a rigorous security check, the guard would be blamed, since he had perfect opportunity. But I suppose you deduced all this, Ellery. What I'd like to know is what put you on to it so quickly?"

Ellery beamed. "You know that Ellery Queen, after whom I'm named, often solves his cases through interpretation of seemingly insignificant clues: a piece of sugar in a dead man's hand, a cut-out piece of paper from the Sunday comics, or a cryptic dying message.

"Well, Ellery once solved a case because there was no top hat where there should have been one, and another case when he noticed the statuette of a bridegroom missing from a newlyweds' apartment. These two cases came to my mind when I realized that this case was also characterized by a lack of clues, by a clue that was missing.

"Finally, I realized that this *lack* of clues was a clue in itself, indicating that the theft must have been perpetrated by someone whose fingerprints on the display case would not be suspicious. This obviously pointed to an insider, and to the logical conclusion that it was Collier himself who stole the necklace."

"Ellery," Inspector Griffen said proudly, "you've earned your name."

Noon that day found Ellery Queen Griffen pounding on the front door of Leora Field's home. After a short while Mrs. Field opened the door and ushered Ellery into the kitchen, where Mrs. Sandy Holden was sipping from a mug of steaming coffee.

"Ellery," she began, and coughed apologetically, "I think that little matter—"

The detective interrupted, "Yes, yes! That's why I'm here! I've got the case all solved. The answer hit me last night, after I managed to—ahem—clear up another slight matter. You see, that postage stamp was a blind! It was planted on the scene of the crime to throw suspicion on three innocent boys, your son included, Mrs. Holden."

"But, Ellery—" Leora Field said.

"Just a minute, please. After deducing that this was all a frameup, I began to wonder who could have

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possibly had access to that stamp—"

"But, Ellery—" she started again.

"In a moment. I went through all the people I knew, matching up motive and opportunity, but I got nowhere."

"Ellery!" Mrs. Field pleaded.

Paying no attention, the young criminologist continued: "Then I found someone. Someone who works every day in Benton's Grocery, which is *right next door to Green's Stamp Shop!* Peter Gould, who merely had to walk next door to purchase that stamp."

The victimized housewife looked at her friend, shrugged, and let Ellery go on.

"So it was Peter Gould who stole your pies; Peter Gould who planted that stamp; Peter Gould who, just the other day, told me that your daughter had refused to go to the movies with him! So, out of revenge, he tried to ruin your contribution to the church bazaar. The case is solved!" E.Q. concluded.

"Ellery," Mrs. Field said patiently, "there never was a case. This whole thing was just a big mistake."

"Excuse me?" Ellery asked calmly.

"There never *was* a case, Ellery. Sandy—Mrs. Holden—came by to pick up those pies yesterday afternoon but, as I told you, I was out with Alison. She didn't know that, though, so she went around back, thinking that I was here in the kitchen, and perhaps couldn't hear the front doorbell. She saw the pies on the window sill and when she realized I wasn't home she took them. Peter Gould had nothing at all to do with it."

"But, but—" Ellery stammered. "My reasoning! There was nothing wrong with it! I—wait a minute! What about that stamp?"

"I think I can explain that," Sandy Holden said. "I didn't want to take the pies without letting Leora know about it, so I left a note. You know that my son Steve collects postage stamps. Well, I picked that one up for him at Green's store, along with some others that Steve ordered, and they were all in a glassine envelope in my purse. When I was looking for a pencil and some paper to leave the note—well, somehow the stamp must have fallen out."

"But the note!" Ellery insisted. "What about the note?"

"Oh," she continued, "I forgot. I wrote the note and put it on the kitchen table, this one right here. The breeze through the open window must have blown it off. When I came over for coffee this morning I learned that Leora thought the pies had been stolen, and I explained the whole thing. We found the note over there in the corner."

"But," Ellery said, "but—"

"Sorry, Ellery, but I'm afraid you were all wrong."

"But," Ellery said, "but—"

"Oh, Ellery!" Alison giggled from the doorway.

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a MISS MARPLE story by
AGATHA CHRISTIE

Miss Marple lives in an English village named St. Mary Mead. She can remain in her small community all her life and yet solve crimes committed all over the world—what might be called "village detecting." How does she do it? Really it's quite simple. "Human nature," explains Miss Marple, "is much the same in a village as anywhere else." There is always in Miss Marple's shrewd and perceptive mind a village parallel to suggest the truth . . .

THE COMPANION

by AGATHA CHRISTIE

"NOW, DR. LLOYD," SAID MISS Helier. "Don't *you* know any creepy stories?"

She smiled at him—the smile that nightly bewitched the theater-going public. Jane Helier was sometimes called the most beautiful woman in England, and jealous members of her own profession were in the habit of saying to each other, "Of course Jane's not an *artist*. She can't *act*—if you know what I mean. It's those eyes!"

And those "eyes" were at this minute fixed appealingly on the grizzled elderly bachelor doctor who, for the last five years, had ministered to the ailments of the village of St. Mary Mead.

With an unconscious gesture the doctor pulled down his waistcoat (inclined of late to be uncomfortably tight) and racked his brains hastily, so as not to disappoint the lovely creature who addressed him so confidently.

"I feel," said Jane dreamily, "that I would like to wallow in crime this evening."

"Splendid," said Colonel Bantry, her host. "Splendid, splendid." And he laughed a loud hearty military laugh. "Eh, Dolly?"

His wife, hastily recalled to the exigencies of social life (she had been planning her spring border), agreed enthusiastically.

"Of course it's splendid," she said heartly but vaguely. "I always thought so."

"Did you, my dear?" said Miss Marple, and her eyes twinkled.

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"We don't get much in the creepy line—and still less in the criminal line—in St. Mary Mead, you know, Miss Helier," said Dr. Lloyd.

"You surprise me," said Sir Henry Clithering. The ex-Commissioner of Scotland Yard turned to Miss Marple. "I always understood that St. Mary Mead is a positive hot bed of crime and vice."

"Oh, Sir Henry!" protested Miss Marple, a spot of color coming into her cheeks. "I'm sure I never said anything of the kind. The only thing I ever said was that human nature is much the same in a village as anywhere else, only one has opportunities and leisure for seeing it at closer quarters."

"But *you* haven't always lived here," said Jane Helier, still addressing the doctor. "You've been in all sorts of queer places all over the world—places where things *happen!*"

"That is so, of course," said Dr. Lloyd, still thinking desperately. "Yes, of course . . . Yes . . . Ah, I have it!"

He sank back with a sigh of relief.

"It is some years ago now—I had almost forgotten. But the facts were really very strange—very strange indeed. And the final coincidence which put the clue into my hand was strange also."

Miss Helier drew her chair a little nearer to him, applied some lipstick, and waited expectantly. The others also turned interested faces toward him.

"I don't know whether any of you know the Canary Islands," began the doctor.

"They must be wonderful," said Jane Helier. "They're in the South Seas, aren't they? Or is it the Mediterranean?"

"I've called in there on my way to South Africa," said the Colonel. "The Peak of Teneriffe is a fine sight with the setting sun on it."

"The incident I am describing happened in the island of Grand Canary, not Teneriffe. It is a good many years ago now. I had had a breakdown in health and was forced to give up my practice in England to go abroad. I practiced in Las Palmas, which is the principal town of Grand Canary.

"In many ways I enjoyed the life out there very much. The climate was mild and sunny, there was excellent surf bathing and the sea life of the port attracted me. Ships from all over the world put in at Las Palmas. I used to walk along the mole every morning far more interested than any member of the fair sex could be in a street of hat shops.

"As I say, ships from all over the world put in at Las Palmas. Sometimes they stay a few hours, sometimes a day or two. In the principal hotel there, the Metropole, you will see people of all races and nationalities—birds of passage. Even the people going to Teneriffe usually come here and stay a few days before crossing to the other island.

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"My story begins in the Metropole Hotel one Thursday evening in January. There was a dance going on and I and a friend had been sitting at a small table watching the scene. There were a fair sprinkling of English and other nationalities, but the majority of the dancers were Spanish; and when the orchestra struck up a tango, half a dozen couples of the latter nationality took the floor. They all danced well and we looked on and admired. One woman in particular excited our lively admiration. Tall, beautiful, and sinuous, she moved with the grace of a half-tamed leopardess. There was something dangerous about her. I said as much to my friend and he agreed.

"'Women like that,' he said, 'are bound to have a history. Life will not pass them by.'

"'Beauty is perhaps a dangerous possession,' I said.

"'It's not only beauty,' he insisted. 'There is something else. Look at her again. Things are bound to happen to that woman, or because of her. As I said, life will not pass her by. Strange and exciting events will surround her. You've only to look at her to know it.'

"He paused and then added with a smile, 'Just as you've only to look at those two women over there and know that nothing out of the way could ever happen to either of them! They are made for a safe and uneventful existence.'

"I followed his eyes. The two women he referred to were travelers who had just arrived—a Holland Lloyd boat had put into port that evening and the passengers were just beginning to arrive.

"As I looked at them I saw at once what my friend meant. They were two English ladies—the thoroughly nice traveling English that you do find abroad. Their ages, I should say, were about forty. One was fair and a little—just a little—too plump; the other was dark and a little—again just a little—inclined to scragginess.

"They were what is called well-preserved, quietly and inconspicuously dressed in well-cut tweeds, and innocent of any kind of make-up. They had that air of quiet assurance which is the birthright of well-bred Englishwomen. There was nothing remarkable about either of them. They were like thousands of their sisters. They would doubtless see what they wished to see, assisted by Baedeker, and be blind to everything else. They would use the English library and attend the English church in any place they happened to be, and it was quite likely that one or both of them sketched a little. And as my friend said, nothing exciting or remarkable would ever happen to either of them, though they might quite likely travel half over the world. I looked from them back to our sinuous Spanish woman with her half-closed smoldering eyes and I smiled."

"Poor things," said Jane Helier

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with a sigh. "But I do think it's so silly of people not to make the most of themselves. That woman in Bond Street—Valentine—is really wonderful. Audrey Denman goes to her; and have you seen her in *The Downward Step?* As the schoolgirl in the first act she's really marvelous. And yet Audrey is fifty if she's a day. As a matter of fact, I happen to know she's really nearer sixty."

"Go on," said Mrs. Bantry to Dr. Lloyd. "I love stories about sinuous Spanish dancers. It makes me forget how old and fat I am."

"I'm sorry," said Dr. Lloyd apologetically. "But you see, as a matter of fact, this story isn't about the Spanish woman."

"It isn't?"

"No. As it happens, my friend and I were wrong. Nothing in the least exciting happened to the Spanish beauty. She married a clerk in a shipping office and by the time I left the island she had had five children and was getting very fat."

"Just like that girl of Israel Peters," commented Miss Marple. "The one who went on the stage and had such good legs that they made her principal boy in the pantomime. Everyone said she'd come to no good, but she married a commercial traveler and settled down splendidly."

"The village parallel," murmured Sir Henry softly.

"No," went on the doctor. "My story is about the two English ladies."

"Something happened to them?" breathed Miss Helier.

"Something happened to them—and the very next day, too."

"Yes?" said Mrs. Bantry encouragingly.

"Just for curiosity, as I went out that evening, I glanced at the hotel register. I found the names easily enough. Miss Mary Barton and Miss Amy Durrant of Little Paddocks, Caughton Weir, Bucks. I little thought then how soon I was to encounter the owners of those names again—and under what tragic circumstances.

"The following day I had arranged to go for a picnic with some friends. We were to motor across the island, taking our lunch, to a place called Las Nieves, a well-sheltered bay where we could swim if we felt inclined. This program we duly carried out, except that we were somewhat late in starting, so that we stopped on the way and picnicked, going on to Las Nieves afterwards for a swim before tea.

"As we approached the beach we were at once aware of a tremendous commotion. The whole population of the small village seemed to be gathered on the shore. As soon as they saw us they rushed towards the car and began explaining excitedly. My Spanish not being very good, it took me a few minutes to understand, but at last I got it.

"Two of the mad English ladies had gone in to swim, and one had swum out too far and got into dif-

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ficulties. The other had gone after her and had tried to bring her in, but her strength in turn had failed and she too would have drowned had not a man rowed out in a boat and brought in rescuer and rescued—the latter beyond help.

"As soon as I got the hang of things I pushed the crowd aside and hurried down the beach. I did not at first recognize the two women. The plump figure in the black stockinette costume and the tight green-rubber bathing cap awoke no chord of recognition as she looked up anxiously. She was kneeling beside the body of her friend, making somewhat amateurish attempts at artificial respiration. When I told her that I was a doctor she gave a sigh of relief, and I ordered her off at once to one of the cottages for a rubdown and dry clothing. One of the ladies in my party went with her. I myself worked unavailingly on the body of the drowned woman. Life was only too clearly extinct, and in the end I had reluctantly to give up.

"I rejoined the others in the small fisherman's cottage and there I had to break the sad news. The survivor was attired now in her own clothes and I immediately recognized her as one of the two arrivals of the night before. She received the sad news fairly calmly, and it was evidently the horror of the whole thing that struck her more than any great personal feeling.

"'Poor Amy,' she said. 'Poor, poor Amy. She had been looking forward to the bathing here so much. And she was a good swimmer too. I can't understand it. What do you think it can have been, Doctor?'

"'Possibly cramp. Will you tell me exactly what happened?'

"'We had both been swimming about for some time—twenty minutes, I should say. Then I thought I would go in, but Amy said she was going to swim out once more. She did so, and suddenly I heard her call and realized she was crying for help. I swam out as fast as I could. She was still afloat when I got to her, but she clutched at me wildly and we both went under. If it hadn't been for that man coming out with his boat I should have been drowned too.'

"'That has happened fairly often,' I said. 'To save anyone from drowning is not an easy affair.'

"'It seems so awful,' continued Miss Barton. 'We only arrived yesterday and were so delighting in the sunshine and our little vacation. And now this—this terrible tragedy occurs.'

"I asked her then for particulars about the dead woman, explaining that I would do everything I could for her, but that the Spanish authorities would require full information. This she gave me readily enough.

"The dead woman, Miss Amy Durrant, was her companion and had come to her about five months

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previously. They had got on very well together, but Miss Durrant had spoken very little about her people. She had been left an orphan at an early age and had been brought up by an uncle and had earned her own living since she was twenty-one.

"And so that was that," went on the doctor. He paused and said again, but this time with a certain finality in his voice, "And so that was that."

"I don't understand," said Jane Helier. "Is that all? I mean, it's very tragic, I suppose, but it isn't—well, it isn't what I call *creepy*."

"I think there's more to follow," said Sir Henry.

"Yes," said Dr. Lloyd, "there's more to follow. You see, at the time there was one queer thing. Of course I asked questions of the fishermen and others as to what they'd seen. They were eyewitnesses. And one woman had rather a funny story. I didn't pay any attention to it at the time, but it came back to me afterwards.

"She insisted, you see, that Miss Durrant wasn't in difficulties when she called out. The other swam out to her and, according to this woman, deliberately held Miss Durrant's head underwater. I didn't, as I say, pay much attention. It was such a fantastic sotry, and these things look so differently from the shore. Miss Barton might have tried to make her friend lose consciousness, realizing that the latter's panic-stricken clutching would drown them both. You see, according to the Spanish woman's story, it looked as though—well, as though Miss Barton was deliberately trying to drown her companion.

"As I say, I paid very little attention to this story at the time. It came back to me later. Our great difficulty was to find out anything about this woman, Amy Durrant. She didn't seem to have any relatives. Miss Barton and I went through her things together. We found one address and wrote there, but it proved to be simply a room she had taken in which to keep some of her things. The landlady knew nothing, had only seen her when she took the room. Miss Durrant had remarked at the time that she always liked to have one place she could call her own to which she could return at any moment. There were one or two nice pieces of old furniture and some bound numbers of Academy pictures, and a trunkful of pieces of material bought at sales, but no personal belongings. She had mentioned to the landlady that her father and mother had died in India when she was a child and that she had been brought up by an uncle who was a clergyman, but she did not say if he was her father's or her mother's brother, so the name was no guide.

"It wasn't exactly mysterious, it was just unsatisfactory. There must be many lonely women, proud and reticent, in just that position. There were a couple of photographs

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among her belongings in Las Palmas —rather old and faded and they had been cut to fit the frames they were in, so that there was no photographer's name on them, and there was an old daguerreotype which might have been her mother or more probably her grandmother.

"Miss Barton had had two of her companion's references with her. One she had forgotten, but the other name she recollected after an effort. It proved to be that of a lady who was now abroad, having gone to Australia. She was written to. Her answer, of course, was a long time in coming, and I may say that when it did arrive there was no particular help to be gained from it. She said Miss Durrant had also been with her as companion and had been most efficient and that she was a very charming woman, but that she knew nothing of her private affairs or family.

"So there it was—as I say, nothing unusual, really. It was just the two things together that aroused my uneasiness. This Amy Durrant of whom no one knew anything, and the Spanish woman's queer story. Yes, and I'll add a third thing: When I was first bending over the body and Miss Barton was walking away towards the huts, she looked back. Looked back with an expression on her face that I can only describe as one of poignant anxiety—a kind of anguished uncertainty that imprinted itself on my brain.

"It didn't strike me as anything unusual at the time. I put it down to her terrible distress over her friend. But, you see, later I realized that they weren't on those terms. There was no devoted attachment between them, no terrible grief. Miss Barton was fond of Amy Durrant and shocked by her death—that was all.

"Then why the terribly poignant anxiety? That was the question that kept coming back to me. I had not been mistaken in that look. And almost against my will an answer began to shape itself in my mind. Supposing the Spanish woman's story were true; supposing that Mary Barton willfully and in cold blood tried to drown Amy Durrant. She succeeds in holding her underwater while pretending to be saving her. She is rescued by a boat. They are on a lonely beach far from anywhere. And then I appear—the last thing she expects. A doctor! And an English doctor!

"She knows well enough that people who have been underwater far longer than Amy Durrant have been revived by artificial respiration. But she has to play her part—to go off leaving me alone with her victim. And as she turns for one last look, a terribly poignant anxiety shows in her face. Will Amy Durrant come back to life *and tell what she knows*?"

"Oh!" said Jane Helier. "I'm thrilled now."

"Viewed in that aspect the whole business seemed more sinister, and the personality of Amy Durrant be-

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came more mysterious. Who was Amy Durrant? Why should she, an insignificant paid companion, be murdered by her employer? What story lay behind that fatal bathing expedition?

"She had entered Mary Barton's employment only a few months before. Mary Barton had brought her abroad, and the very day after they landed the tragedy had occurred. And they were both nice commonplace refined Englishwomen! The whole thing was fantastic, and I told myself so. I had been letting my imagination run away with me."

"You didn't do anything, then?" asked Miss Helier.

"My dear young lady, what could I do? There was no evidence. The majority of the eyewitnesses told the same story as Miss Barton. I had built up my own suspicions out of a fleeting expression which I might possibly have imagined. The only thing I could and did do was to see that the widest inquiries were made for the relatives of Amy Durrant. The next time I was in England I even went and saw the landlady of her room, with the results I have told you."

"But you felt there was something wrong," said Miss Marple.

Dr. Lloyd nodded.

"Half the time I was ashamed of myself for thinking so. Who was I to go suspecting this nice, pleasant-mannered English lady of a foul and cold-blooded crime? I did my best to be as cordial as possible to her during the short time she stayed on the island. I helped her with the Spanish authorities. I did everything I could do as an Englishman to help a compatriot in a foreign country; and yet I am convinced that she knew I suspected and disliked her."

"How long did she stay out there?" asked Miss Marple.

"I think it was about a fortnight. Miss Durrant was buried there, and it must have been about ten days later when Mary Barton took a boat back to England. The shock had upset her so much that she felt she couldn't spend the winter there as she had planned. That's what she said."

"Did it seem to upset her?" asked Miss Marple.

The doctor hesitated.

"Well, I don't know that it affected her appearance at all," he said cautiously.

"She didn't, for instance, grow fatter?" asked Miss Marple.

"Do you know—it's a curious thing your saying that. Now I come to think back, I believe you're right. She—yes, she did seem, if anything, to be putting on weight."

"How horrible," said Jane Helier with a shudder. "It's like—it's like fattening on your victim's blood."

"And yet, in another way, I may be doing her an injustice," went on Dr. Lloyd. "She certainly said something before she left which pointed in an entirely different direction. There may be, I think there are, con-

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sciences which work very slowly—which take some time to awaken to the enormity of the deed committed.

"It was the evening before her departure from the Canaries. She had asked me to go and see her, and had thanked me warmly for all I had done to help her. I, of course, made light of the matter, said I had only done what was natural under the circumstances, and so on. There was a pause after that, and then she suddenly asked me a question.

"'Do you think,' she asked, 'that one is ever justified in taking the law into one's own hands?'

"I replied that that was rather a difficult question, but that on the whole I thought not. The law was the law, and we had to abide by it.

"'Even when it is powerless?'

"'I don't quite understand.'

"'It's difficult to explain; but one might do something that is considered definitely wrong—that is considered a crime, even, for a very good and sufficient reason.'

"I replied dryly that many criminals had thought that in their time, and she shrank back.

"'But that's horrible,' she murmured. 'Horrible.'

"And then with a change of tone she asked me to give her something to make her sleep. She had not been able to sleep properly since—she hesitated—since that terrible shock.

"'You're sure it is that? There is nothing worrying you? Nothing on your mind?'

"'On my mind? What should be on my mind?'

"She spoke fiercely and suspiciously.

"'Worry is a cause of sleeplessness sometimes,' I said lightly.

"She seemed to brood for a moment.

"'Do you mean worrying over the future, or worrying over the past, which can't be altered?'

"'Either.'

"'Only it wouldn't be any good worrying over the past. You couldn't bring back—oh! what's the use! one mustn't think. One must not think.'

I prescribed a mild sleeping pill and made my adieu. As I went away I wondered not a little over the words she had spoken. 'You couldn't bring back—' What? Or *who?*

"I think that last interview prepared me in a way for what was to come. I didn't expect it, of course, but when it happened, I wasn't surprised. Because, you see, Mary Barton struck me all along as a conscientious woman—not a weak sinner, but a woman with convictions, who would act up to them, and who would not relent as long as she still believed in them. I fancied that in that last conversation we had she was beginning to doubt her own convictions. I know her words suggested to me that she was feeling the first faint beginnings of that terrible soul-searcher—remorse.

"The thing happened in Cornwall, in a small watering place,

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ather deserted at that season of the ear. It must have been—let me see —late March. I read about it in the papers. A lady had been staying at small hotel there—a Miss Barton. She had been very odd and peculiar n her manner. That had been noiced by all.

"At night she would walk up and down her room, muttering to herself, and not allowing the people on either side of her to sleep. She had called on the vicar one day and had old him that she had a communication of the gravest importance to make to him. She had, she said, committed a crime. Then, instead of proceeding, she had stood up abruptly and said she would call another day. The vicar put her down as being slightly unbalanced, and did not take her self-accusation seriously.

"The very next morning she was found to be missing from her room. A note was left addressed to the coroner. It ran as follows:

"I tried to speak to the vicar yesterday, to confess all, but was not allowed. She would not let me. I can make amends only one way—a life for a life; and my life must go the same way as hers did. I, too, must drown in the deep sea. I believed I was justified. I see now that was not so. If I desire Amy's forgiveness I must go to her. Let no one be blamed for my death—Mary Barton.

"Her clothes were found lying on the beach in a secluded cove nearby, and it seemed clear that she had undressed there and swum resolutely out to sea where the current was known to be swift, sweeping and dangerous.

"The body was never discovered, but after a time permission was given to assume death. She was a rich woman, her estate being proved at more than a hundred thousand pounds. Since she died intestate it all went to her next of kin—a family of cousins in Australia. The papers made discreet references to the tragedy in the Canary Islands, putting forward the theory that the death of Miss Durrant had unhinged her friend's brain. At the inquest the usual verdict of *Suicide while temporarily insane* was returned.

"And so the curtain falls on the tragedy of Amy Durrant and Mary Barton."

There was a long pause and then Jane Helier gasped.

"Oh, but you mustn't stop there —just at the most interesting part. Go on."

"But you see, Miss Helier, this isn't a serial story. This is real life; and real life stops just where it chooses."

"But I don't want it to," said Jane. "I want to know."

"This is where we use our brains, Miss Helier," explained Sir Henry. "Why did Mary Barton kill her companion? That's the problem Dr. Lloyd has set us."

"Oh, well," said Miss Helier,

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"she might have killed her for lots of reasons. I mean—oh, I don't know. She might have got on her nerves, or else she got jealous, although Dr. Lloyd doesn't mention any men, but still on the boat out—well, you know what everyone says about boats and sea voyages."

Miss Helier paused, slightly out of breath, and it was borne in upon her audience that the outside of Jane's charming head was distinctly superior to the inside.

"I would like to have a lot of guesses," said Mrs. Bantry. "But I suppose I must confine myself to one. Well, I think that Miss Barton's father made all his money out of ruining Amy Durrant's father, so Amy determined to have her revenge. Oh, no, that's the wrong way around. How tiresome! Why does the rich employer kill the humble companion? I've got it. Miss Barton had a young brother who shot himself for love of Amy Durrant. Miss Barton waits her time. Amy comes down in the world. Miss B. engages her as companion and takes her to the Canaries and accomplishes her revenge. How's that?"

"Excellent," said Sir Henry. "Only we don't know that Miss Barton ever had a young brother."

"We deduce that," said Mrs. Bantry. "Unless she had a young brother there's no motive. So she must have had a young brother. Do you see, Watson?"

"That's all very fine, Dolly," said her husband. "But it's only a guess."

"Of course it is," said Mrs. Bantry. "That's all we can do—guess. We haven't got any clues. Go on, dear, have a guess yourself."

"Upon my word, I don't know what to say. But I think there's something in Miss Helier's suggestion that they fell out about a man. Look here, Dolly, it was probably some high-church parson. They both embroidered him a cope or something, and he wore the Durrant woman's first. Depend upon it, it was something like that. Look how she went off to a parson at the end. These women all lose their heads over a good-looking clergyman. You hear of it over and over again."

"I think I must try and make my explanation a little more subtle," said Sir Henry, "though I admit it's only a guess. I suggest that Miss Barton was always mentally unhinged. There are more cases like that than you would imagine. Her mania grew stronger and she began to believe it her duty to rid the world of certain persons—possibly what is termed 'unfortunate females.' Nothing much is known about Miss Durrant's past. So very possibly she *had* a past—an 'unfortunate' one. Miss Barton learns of this and decides on extermination. Later, her act begins to trouble her and she is overcome by remorse. Her end shows her to be completely unhinged. Now, do say you agree with me, Miss Marple."

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"I'm afraid I don't, Sir Henry," said Miss Marple, smiling apologetically. "I think her end shows her to have been a very clever and resourceful woman."

Jane Helier interrupted with a little scream.

"Oh, I've been so stupid! May I guess again? Of course it must have been that. Blackmail! The companion woman was blackmailing her. Only I don't see why Miss Marple says it was clever of her to kill herself. I can't see that at all."

"Ah!" said Sir Henry. "You see, Miss Marple knew a case just like it in St. Mary Mead."

"You always laugh at me, Sir Henry," said Miss Marple reproachfully. "I must confess it does remind me just a little of old Mrs. Trout. She drew the old age pension, you know, for three old women who were dead, in different parishes."

"It sounds like a most complicated and resourceful crime," said Sir Henry. "But it doesn't seem to me to throw any light on our present problem."

"Of course not," said Miss Marple. "It wouldn't—to you. But some of the families were very poor, and the old age pension was a great boon to the children. I know it's difficult for anyone outside to understand. But what I really meant was that the whole thing hinged on one old woman being so like any other old woman."

"Eh?" said Sir Henry, mystified.

"I always explain things so badly. What I mean is that when Dr. Lloyd described the two ladies first, he didn't know which was which, and I don't suppose anyone else in the hotel did. They would have, of course, after a day or so, but the very next day one of the two was drowned, and if the one who was left said she was Miss Barton, I don't suppose it would ever occur to anyone that she mightn't be."

"You think—oh, I see," said Sir Henry slowly.

"It's the only natural way of thinking of it. Dear Mrs. Bantry began that way just now. Why *should* the rich employer kill the humble companion? It's so much more likely to be the other way about. I mean—that's the way things happen."

"Is it?" said Sir Henry. "You shock me."

"But of course," went on Miss Marple, "she would have to wear Miss Barton's clothes, and they would probably be a little tight on her, so that her general appearance would look as though she had got a little fatter. That's why I asked the question. A man would be sure to think it was the lady who had got fatter, and not the clothes that had got smaller—though that isn't quite the right way of putting it."

"But if Amy Durrant killed Miss Barton, what did she gain by it?" asked Mrs. Bantry. "She couldn't keep up the deception forever."

"She only kept it up for another

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month or so," pointed out Miss Marple. "And during that time I expect she traveled, keeping away from anyone who might know her. That's what I meant by saying that one lady of a certain age looks so like another. I don't suppose the different photograph on her passport was ever noticed—you know what passports are. And then in March, she went down to this Cornish place and began to act queerly and draw attention to herself so that when people found her clothes on the beach and read her last letter they shouldn't think of the common-sense conclusion."

"Which was?" asked Sir Henry.

"*No body,*" said Miss Marple firmly. "That's the thing that would stare you in the face, if there weren't such a lot of red herrings to draw you off the trail—including the suggestion of foul play and remorse. *No body*. That was the really significant fact."

"Do you mean—" said Mrs. Bantry, "do you mean that there wasn't any remorse? That she didn't drown herself?"

"Not she!" said Miss Marple. "It's just Mrs. Trout over again. Mrs. Trout was very good at red herrings, but she met her match in me. And I can see through your remorse-driven Miss Barton. Drown herself? Went off to Australia, if I'm any good at guessing."

"You are, Miss Marple," said Dr. Lloyd. "Undoubtedly you are. Now it again took me quite by surprise. Why, you could have knocked me down with a feather that day in Melbourne."

"Was that what you spoke of as a final coincidence?"

Dr. Lloyd nodded.

"Yes, it was rather rough luck on Miss Barton—or Miss Amy Durrant—whatever you like to call her. I became a ship's doctor for a while, and landing in Melbourne, the first person I saw as I walked down the street was the lady I thought had been drowned in Cornwall. She saw the game was up as far as I was concerned, and she did the bold thing—took me into her confidence.

"A curious woman, completely lacking, I suppose, in some moral sense. She was the oldest of a family of nine, all wretchedly poor. They had applied once for help to their rich cousin in England and been repulsed, Miss Barton having quarreled with their father. Money was wanted desperately, for the three youngest children were delicate and needed expensive medical treatment. Amy Barton then and there seems to have decided on her plan of cold-blooded murder.

"She set out for England, working her passage over as a children's nurse. She obtained the situation of companion to Miss Barton, calling herself Amy Durrant. She engaged a room and put some furniture into it so as to create a personality for herself. The drowning plan was a sudden inspiration. She had been

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waiting for some opportunity to present itself. Then she staged the final scene of the drama and returned to Australia, and in due time she and her brothers and sisters inherited Miss Barton's money as next of kin."

"A very bold and perfect crime," said Sir Henry. "Almost *the* perfect crime. If it had been Miss Barton who had died in the Canaries, suspicion might attach to Amy Durrant and her connection with the Barton family might have been discovered; but the change of identity and the double crime, as you may call it, did away with that. Yes, almost the perfect crime."

"What happened to her?" asked Mrs. Bantry. "What did you do in the matter, Dr. Lloyd?"

"I was in a very curious position, Mrs. Bantry. Of evidence, as the law understands it, I still had very little. Also, there were certain signs, plain to me as a medical man, that though strong and vigorous in appearance, the lady was not long for this world. I went home with her and saw the rest of the family—a charming family, devoted to their oldest sister and without an idea in their heads that she might have committed a crime.

"Why bring sorrow on them when I could prove nothing? The lady's admission to me was unheard by anyone else. I let Nature take its course. Miss Amy Barton died six months after my meeting with her. I have often wondered if she was cheerful and unrepentant up to the last."

"Surely not," said Mrs. Bantry.

"I expect so," said Miss Marple. "Mrs. Trout was."

Jane Helier gave herself a little shake.

"Well," she said. "It's very, very thrilling. I don't quite understand now who drowned which. And how does this Mrs. Trout come into it?"

"She doesn't, my dear," said Miss Marple. "She was only a person—not a very nice person—in the village."

"Oh!" said Jane. "In the village. But nothing ever happens in a village, does it?" she sighed. "I'm sure I shouldn't have any brains at all if I lived in a village."

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QUEEN'S QUORUM

Supplement Number Two (1961-1967)

by ELLERY QUEEN

Chapter XI. *Renaissance and Moderns Continuing*

(Patrick Quentin, Stuart Palmer and Craig Rice, Helen McCloy, Robert L. Fish, Miriam Allen deFord, Michael Gilbert, Harry Kemelman, and others)

At the approach and the beginning of the sixth decade, two well-known authors brought out books containing superior examples of the once-popular "pulp-action" story. MacKinlay Kantor's IT'S ABOUT CRIME (New York: New American Library, 1960) was nostalgic—composed mostly of stories published in the 1930's which served the author as "a means toward an end . . . steps in the ladder" of literary success.

Fredric Brown's THE SHAGGY DOG AND OTHER MURDERS (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1963) was made up of stories from the "pulp" magazines of the 1940's. But more interesting, especially in technical adroitness, is Fredric Brown's earlier NIGHTMARES AND GEEZENSTACKS (New York: Bantam, 1961), an original paperback of no less than 47 stories, mostly of fantasy but with eight taut, sometimes striking, tales in the crime-horror-mystery genre.

Another book that appeared near the turn of the decade should not be overlooked—Manning Coles's NOTHING TO DECLARE (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1960) about Thomas Elphinstone (Tommy) Hambledon, British Intelligence, of DRINK TO YESTERDAY (1940) and A TOAST TO TOMORROW (1941) fame. The lighthearted Tommy thwarts smugglers with refreshing humor.

Still another book of 1960 should be mentioned: Theodore Mathieson's THE GREAT "DETECTIVES" (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1960) with an Introduction by Ellery Queen. This is a courageously ambitious

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collection "in which a famous person of the past acts as detective just once at a critical point in his career"—and the ten great "detectives" include Alexander the Great, Omar Khayyam, Leonardo da Vinci, de Cervantes, Dan'l Boone, and Florence Nightingale.

Robert Bloch's most representative book of short stories offers 17 tales all guaranteed to have been brewed in a wizard's caldron. You will find murder, mystery, and magic in Robert Bloch's BLOOD RUNS COLD (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1961), ranging from the ironically humorous to the shockingly macabre.

The next entry in Queen's Quorum was long a-coming. "The New York Times" once asked: "And when, by the way, will some publisher have the good sense to bring out a long overdue collection of Patrick Quentin's excellent short stories?" Two publishers finally had the good sense. First, in England—

119. Patrick Quentin's
THE ORDEAL OF MRS. SNOW
London: Victor Gollancz, 1961

and the next year, under the same title, in the United States (New York: Random House, 1962).

This is a superb collection by "a master of the offbeat and subtle effect." One of the unusual features of the book is the emphasis on child-murderers, normally a taboo theme, but handled by Patrick Quentin with chilling finesse.

Another 1961 book, an original paperback, should not be missed: Julian Symons's MURDER! MURDER! (London: Collins, Fontana Books, 1961), the first collection of short stories about Francis Quarles, private detective. A second volume of Francis Quarles's memoirs, also an original paperback, appeared four years later: Julian Symons's FRANCIS QUARLES INVESTIGATES (London: Panther, 1965). And to echo "The New York Times" plea in behalf of Patrick Quentin, when will some publisher have the good sense to bring out a long overdue collection of Julian Symons's "serious studies of crime"? These penetrating and realistic short stories represent Mr. Symons's finest work in the field.

In 1962 the detective-crime short story took a holiday, but the next year two old favorites—alas, both no longer with us—collaborated in

120. Stuart Palmer's and Craig Rice's
PEOPLE VS. WITHERS & MALONE
New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963

with a double-barreled introduction by Ellery Queen and Stuart Palmer.

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In these days of so much downbeat "realism," the stories about Hildegarde Withers and John J. Malone as partners-in-crime-detecting are like a breath of spring after a long hard winter. That rowdy legal eagle, John J., could wiggle and wriggle himself into seemingly impossible predicaments, and only the prim and prudish Hildy could extricate the perennially hungover John J.—with the extricating process, as always, rife with risk and full o' fun . . . If only there could be more mad capers by those two madcappers!

Again the detective-crime short story hibernated for a year, then in 1965 a book containing five scintillating detective-crime shorts, two about Dr. Basil Willing, psychiatrist-detective, demanded inclusion in Queen's Quorum:

121. Helen McCloy's
SURPRISE, SURPRISE!
London: Victor Gollancz, 1965

The United States edition was published later in the same year as THE SINGING DIAMONDS AND OTHER STORIES (New York: Dodd, Mead, 1965). To quote from Brett Halliday's Introduction to the American edition, "Miss McCloy offers the reader more than the usual detective story. Though every clue is part of a logical whole and every mystery is capable of a rational solution, there is something more for the imaginative reader . . . In each [story] there is an element of the uncanny. In each the reader is challenged to go below the surface of what-seemingly-is to the submerged currents of what-may-very-possibly-be."

The next year brought forth the best full volume of parody-pastiches of Sherlock Holmes ever written:

122. Robert L. Fish's
THE INCREDIBLE SCHLOCK HOMES
New York: Simon and Schuster, 1966

In his Introduction, Anthony Boucher called these twelve "unpardonably and outrageously funny" tales, these Blasphemous, Sacrilegious, Irreverent spoofs, "the best of all mock-Holmesian literature," and Mr. Boucher pointed out that he had yet to hear a murmur of dissent from Sherlockian authorities and connoisseurs. A B.S.I. investiture, printed backward, to the creator of that ingenious Master Defective, Schlock Homes, and to that ingenuous Master Ineffective, Dr. Watney, who reside (and will forevermore) at 221-B Bagel Street, London.

And so we come to the final year of Supplement Two—1967, definitely a vintage year, and a good omen for the remainder of this decade. Some

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of the Renaissance writers are still making important contributions, as are some of the First and Second Moderns—which only proves that the Poe-Doyle-Freeman-MacHarg-Chesterton-Post-Christie-Carr-Queen-Hammett-Vickers continuity persists.

But who will constitute the next classic group?—the Third Moderns to be accorded cornerstone recognition in Queen's Quorum?

Well, dear reader, here is the way the wind is blowing . . . When the first mystery short-story collection of Black Humor or Cool Grotesque or Comic Outré or Funny Bizarre or Evangelic Psychedelic or just 'Tecs-tures of the Absurd (or the Obscure)—when such a book is published, the Third Moderns will be "in," and a new era of the detective-crime short story will be swinging, man, swinging. *That's* how the wind is blowing, baby . . .

Now, back to 1967, the 122nd year A.P. (After Poe)—the year of the crime-spy-detective hat trick, the first time since 1946 that as many as three books of mystery short stories qualified for cornerstone honors. The first book in this mystery mosaic (as distinguished from a merging or mingling) was written by a true Renaissance woman, Miriam Allen deFord, who has been publishing for more than half a century (one of her stories was included in O. HENRY MEMORIAL AWARD PRIZE STORIES as early as 1930). Her special interest has always been in the curious and unusual, but it has never been divorced from real people and realistic cause and effect. It is a pleasure to recognize the faultless taste, clarity of expression, "special insight into human ways," and "sound knowledge of abnormal psychology" in

123. Miriam Allen deFord's
THE THEME IS MURDER
New York: Abelard-Schuman, 1967

The next book in Queen's Quorum has been called, with justice, the second best volume of spy stories ever written—critics almost without exception give first place to W. Somerset Maugham's ASHENDEN (1928). Maugham is acknowledged to have been the "father" of the modern, naturalistic secret-service story, and

124. Michael Gilbert's
GAME WITHOUT RULES
New York: Harper & Row, 1967

brings the spy-and-counterspy story full-bloodedly, three-dimensionally, up to 1968. These "wild and wonderful tales" (Rex Stout's description) of secret agents Mr. Samuel Behrens and Mr. Daniel Joseph Calder, those

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quiet, mild-mannered men, apparently retired and retiring, are drawn from the "bitter world of counterintelligence," and told with "a droll, dry wit, and with compassion."

And to close Supplement Two to Queen's Quorum, we select and elect as anchor book of the year

125. Harry Kemelman's
THE NINE MILE WALK
New York: G. P. Putnam, 1967

gathering together the Nicky Welt stories which unquestionably perpetuate the purest form of the detective short story, with the author playing fair with the reader from first word to last. All the Nicky Welt adventures in deduction, which were first published in "Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine," are solved by strict logic and carry on the Dupin-esque-Prince Zaleski-Old Man in the Corner tradition of armchair detection. (And when, "The New York Times" should ask, will there be a collection of James Yaffe's stories about Mom, the Bronx armchair "mayvin"?)

We cannot resist ending this Supplement by quoting Harry Kemelman, not as a detective-story writer but as Assistant Professor of English at State College in Boston: "I consider the [classic detective story] important because it is the one modern form primarily dedicated to giving pleasure to the reader. We are apt to forget these days that that is the principal purpose of literature."

To which we say, after devoting more than forty years to the genre, amen.

ELLERY QUEEN

POSTSCRIPT: The 1951 Little, Brown edition of QUEEN'S QUORUM will be reprinted in the spring of 1969 by Biblo and Tannen Booksellers and Publishers, Inc., 63 Fourth Avenue, New York, New York 10003. The reprint will be in offset, in a handsome format, and limited to 1000 copies at $10 per copy. This new edition will contain Supplements One and Two to QUEEN'S QUORUM, bringing the history of the detective-crime-mystery-spy-suspense short story to the end of 1967, and will therefore be a first edition in book form of these Supplements.

E.Q.

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COMBINED CHECK LIST OF QUEEN'S QUORUM

The 125 Most Important Books of Detective-Crime-Mystery Short Stories

1. Edgar Allan Poe's TALES, 1845
2. "Waters's" RECOLLECTIONS OF A DETECTIVE POLICE-OFFICER, 1856
3. Wilkie Collins's THE QUEEN OF HEARTS, 1859
4. Charles Dickens's HUNTED DOWN, 1860
5. "Anonyma's" THE EXPERIENCES OF A LADY DETECTIVE, 1861
6. Thomas Bailey Aldrich's OUT OF HIS HEAD, 1862
7. Mark Twain's THE CELEBRATED JUMPING FROG OF CALAVERAS COUNTY, 1867
8. Emile Gaboriau's THE LITTLE OLD MAN OF BATIGNOLLES, 1876
9. James M'Govan's BROUGHT TO BAY, 1878
10. DETECTIVE SKETCHES (By A New York Detective), 1881
11. Robert Louis Stevenson's NEW ARABIAN NIGHTS, 1882
12. Frank R. Stockton's THE LADY, OR THE TIGER?, 1884
13. Eden Phillpotts's MY ADVENTURE IN THE FLYING SCOTSMAN, 1888
14. Dick Donovan's THE MAN-HUNTER, 1888
15. Israel Zangwill's THE BIG BOW MYSTERY, 1892
16. A. Conan Doyle's THE ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES, 1892
17. L. T. Meade's and Dr. Clifford Halifax's STORIES FROM THE DIARY OF A DOCTOR, 1894
18. Arthur Morrison's MARTIN HEWITT, INVESTIGATOR, 1894
19. M. P. Shiel's PRINCE ZALESKI, 1895
20. Melville Davisson Post's THE STRANGE SCHEMES OF RANDOLPH MASON, 1896
21. Grant Allen's AN AFRICAN MILLIONAIRE, 1897
22. George R. Sims's DORCAS DENE, DETECTIVE, 1897
23. M. McDonnell Bodkin's PAUL BECK, THE RULE OF THUMB DETECTIVE, 1898
24. Rodrigues Ottolengui's FINAL PROOF, 1898
25. Nicholas Carter's THE DETECTIVE'S PRETTY NEIGHBOR, 1899

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26. E. W. Hornung's THE AMATEUR CRACKSMAN, 1899
27. L. T. Meade's and Robert Eustace's THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE SEVEN KINGS, 1899
28. Herbert Cadett's THE ADVENTURES OF A JOURNALIST, 1900
29. Richard Harding Davis's IN THE FOG, 1901
30. Clifford Ashdown's THE ADVENTURES OF ROMNEY PRINGLE, 1902
31. Bret Harte's CONDENSED NOVELS, 1902
32. Percival Pollard's LINGO DAN, 1903
33. B. Fletcher Robinson's THE CHRONICLES OF ADDINGTON PEACE, 1905
34. Arnold Bennett's THE LOOT OF CITIES, 1905
35. Robert Barr's THE TRIUMPHS OF EUGÈNE VALMONT, 1906
36. Alfred Henry Lewis's CONFESSIONS OF A DETECTIVE, 1906
37. Maurice Leblanc's THE EXPLOITS OF ARSÈNE LUPIN, 1907
38. Jacques Futrelle's THE THINKING MACHINE, 1907
39. George Randolph Chester's GET-RICH-QUICK WALLINGFORD, 1908
40. O. Henry's THE GENTLE GRAFTER, 1908
41. Baroness Orczy's THE OLD MAN IN THE CORNER, 1909
42. R. Austin Freeman's JOHN THORNDYKE'S CASES, 1909
43. J. S. Fletcher's THE ADVENTURES OF ARCHER DAWE (SLEUTH-HOUND), 1909
44. Balduin Groller's DETECTIVE DAGOBERT'S DEEDS AND ADVENTURES, 1910
45. T. W. Hanshew's THE MAN OF THE FORTY FACES, 1910
46. William MacHarg's and Edwin Balmer's THE ACHIEVEMENTS OF LUTHER TRANT, 1910
47. G. K. Chesterton's THE INNOCENCE OF FATHER BROWN, 1911
48. Samuel Hopkins Adams's AVERAGE JONES, 1911
49. Arthur B. Reeve's THE SILENT BULLET, 1912
50. [Gelett Burgess's] THE MASTER OF MYSTERIES, 1912
51. Victor L. Whitechurch's THRILLING STORIES OF THE RAILWAY, 1912
52. R. Austin Freeman's THE SINGING BONE, 1912
53. William Hope Hodgson's CARNACKI THE GHOST-FINDER, 1913
54. Anna Katharine Green's MASTERPIECES OF MYSTERY, 1913
55. Hesketh Prichard's NOVEMBER JOE, 1913
56. Ernest Bramah's MAX CARRADOS, 1914
57. Arthur Sherburne Hardy's DIANE AND HER FRIENDS, 1914
58. Thomas Burke's LIMEHOUSE NIGHTS, 1916

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59. A. E. W. Mason's THE FOUR CORNERS OF THE WORLD, 1917
60. Melville Davisson Post's UNCLE ABNER, 1918
61. Ellis Parker Butler's PHILO GUBB, 1918
62. John Russell's THE RED MARK, 1919
63. William Le Queux's MYSTERIES OF A GREAT CITY, 1920
64. Sax Rohmer's THE DREAM-DETECTIVE, 1920
65. J. Storer Clouston's CARRINGTON'S CASES, 1920
66. Vincent Starrett's THE UNIQUE HAMLET, 1920
67. Arthur Train's TUTT AND MR. TUTT, 1920
68. H. C. Bailey's CALL MR. FORTUNE, 1920
69. Maurice Leblanc's THE EIGHT STROKES OF THE CLOCK, 1922
70. Octavus Roy Cohen's JIM HANVEY, DETECTIVE, 1923
71. Agatha Christie's POIROT INVESTIGATES, 1924
72. Edgar Wallace's THE MIND OF MR. J. G. REEDER, 1925
73. Louis Golding's LUIGI OF CATANZARO, 1926
73a. Louis Golding's PALE BLUE NIGHTGOWN, 1936
74. Anthony Wynne's SINNERS GO SECRETLY, 1927
75. Susan Glaspell's A JURY OF HER PEERS, 1927
76. Dorothy L. Sayers's LORD PETER VIEWS THE BODY, 1928
77. G. D. H. and M. I. Cole's SUPERINTENDENT WILSON'S HOLIDAY, 1928
78. W. Somerset Maugham's ASHENDEN, 1928
79. Percival Wilde's ROGUES IN CLOVER, 1929
80. T. S. Stribling's CLUES OF THE CARIBBEES, 1929
81. Harvey J. O'Higgins's DETECTIVE DUFF UNRAVELS IT, 1929
82. Frederick Irving Anderson's BOOK OF MURDER, 1930
83. F. Tennyson Jesse's THE SOLANGE STORIES, 1931
84. Damon Runyon's GUYS AND DOLLS, 1931
85. Georges Simenon's THE THIRTEEN CULPRITS, 1932
86. Leslie Charteris's THE BRIGHTER BUCCANEER, 1933
87. Henry Wade's POLICEMAN'S LOT, 1933
88. Mignon G. Eberhart's THE CASES OF SUSAN DARE, 1934
89. Irvin S. Cobb's FAITH, HOPE AND CHARITY, 1934
90. Ellery Queen's THE ADVENTURES OF ELLERY QUEEN, 1934
91. C. Daly King's THE CURIOUS MR. TARRANT, 1935

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92. Margery Allingham's MR. CAMPION AND OTHERS, 1939
93. E. C. Bentley's TRENT INTERVENES, 1938
94. Carter Dickson's THE DEPARTMENT OF QUEER COMPLAINTS, 1940
95. William MacHarg's THE AFFAIRS OF O'MALLEY, 1940
96. H. Bustos Domecq's SIX PROBLEMS FOR DON ISIDRO PARODI, 1942
97. William Irish's AFTER-DINNER STORY, 1944
98. Dashiell Hammett's THE ADVENTURES OF SAM SPADE, 1944
99. Raymond Chandler's FIVE MURDERERS, 1944
100. Lillian de la Torre's DR. SAM: JOHNSON, DETECTOR, 1946
101. Rafael Sabatini's TURBULENT TALES, 1946
102. Antonio Helú's THE COMPULSION TO MURDER, 1946
103. Stuart Palmer's THE RIDDLES OF HILDEGARDE WITHERS, 1947
104. Roy Vickers's THE DEPARTMENT OF DEAD ENDS, 1947
105. William Faulkner's KNIGHT'S GAMBIT, 1949
106. Lawrence G. Blochman's DIAGNOSIS: HOMICIDE, 1950
107. John Collier's FANCIES AND GOODNIGHTS, 1951
108. Philip MacDonald's SOMETHING TO HIDE, 1952
109. Lord Dunsany's THE LITTLE TALES OF SMETHERS, 1952
110. Edmund Crispin's BEWARE OF THE TRAINS, 1953
111. Roald Dahl's SOMEONE LIKE YOU, 1953
112. Michael Innes's APPLEBY TALKING, 1954
113. Stanley Ellin's MYSTERY STORIES, 1956
114. Evan Hunter's THE JUNGLE KIDS, 1956
115. Charlotte Armstrong's THE ALBATROSS, 1957
116. Craig Rice's THE NAME IS MALONE, 1958
117. Rufus King's MALICE IN WONDERLAND, 1958
118 Georges Simenon's THE SHORT CASES OF INSPECTOR MAIGRET, 1959
119. Patrick Quentin's THE ORDEAL OF MRS. SNOW, 1961
120. Stuart Palmer's and Craig Rice's PEOPLE VS. WITHERS & MALONE, 1963
121. Helen McCloy's SURPRISE, SURPRISE!, 1965
122. Robert L. Fish's THE INCREDIBLE SCHLOCK HOMES, 1966
123. Miriam Allen deFord's THE THEME IS MURDER, 1967
124. Michael Gilbert's GAME WITHOUT RULES, 1967
125. Harry Kemelman's THE NINE MILE WALK, 1967

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a *NEW* crime story by

BERKELY MATHER

An unusual story set in India and introducing a fascinating character —the little French floozie out of a Grant Road joyhouse whom Mr. Pegler, late sergeant major of the Eighth Royal Dragoons, married and made an honest woman of. Honest woman? Well, judge for yourself . . .

Berkely Mather is the pseudonym of the youngest son of a well-known Australian family. He rebelled against the respectable career planned for him and set out to see the world—sailing on tramp steamers, becoming a soldier in 1932, and spending thirty years in the British Army, seventeen of them in India and the Far and Middle East.

Mr. Mather has written THE ACHILLES AFFAIR, THE PASS BEYOND KASHMIR, *and* THE GOLD OF MALABAR, *as well as many television, radio, and film scripts, including several James Bond adaptations.*

MA TANTE ALWAYS DONE HER BEST

by BERKELY MATHER

A BUGLE SOUNDED FROM THE INfantry Barracks on the other side of the cantonment, and Ma Tante awoke and shifted her bulk, all 230 sweating pounds of it, in the specially reinforced cane chair on the veranda. She swore fretfully in a patois of Marseillaise and Cockney as the prickly heat made itself felt again; she cursed India, and herself for being in it, spat at a lizard on the hot stone steps in front of her, and yelled for Tina. In other words, it was 4:30 in the afternoon and she was following her never-varying routine.

Tina, the little sweeper-caste maid-of-all-work, brought her mistress's tea in a cracked Limoge pot with a handle-less cup doing stand-in duty as a lid, and then went back for the crushed red-pepper rind and local "Tiger Water" gin that Ma Tante added in place of lemon and sugar. Down the dusty road which led past her bungalow to the Saddar Bazaar, life was stirring after the siesta. If there was any business it

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would come now. Not that Ma Tante expected much. All the Army wives were up in the cool of the Hill stations.

A woman rode up to the garden gate on a bicycle, got off, and walked up through the sad marigolds that bordered the cracked cement path. She was not old, but five successive summers in the murderous heat of the North Indian plains had given her the dried parchment skin and lank lifeless hair of a woman twice her age—because she was thin, and you needed fat to stand between you and the sun, as Ma Tante would state with authority.

"Come up here, my lovey, and sit with old Auntie in the cool," Ma Tante greeted her. "A bicycle in this climate—and others not fit to touch the hem of your garment, with their horses yet, and motor cars."

"It is the life we have chosen," said the other primly.

"May the good God be grateful for it," Ma Tante said with feeling. She started to genuflect, remembered that the other woman was a Methodist, and swatted at a fly. "Get Hogarth memsahib a chair, you silly bitch," she added to Tina.

"No, I'm not staying long, Ma Tante," Mrs. Hogarth told her. "I'll just take a quick look through what you've got."

"You don't need to, honeygirl," Ma Tante said. "Got just the very thing. Come in yesterday with a pile of things from Meerut—"

"Then it's no good," Mrs. Hogarth said. "It's for the Missionary Congress in Meerut that I want it."

"What am I talking about?" Ma Tante corrected herself. "Bombay it was. Yes, Bombay. Remember, Tina? Just the very thing for that sweet little Mrs. Hogarth, I said as soon as I saw it. Just your coloring, love. The pink, Tina—hanging on the third rack. Come on, move yourself."

"I don't think pink is quite—" began the other doubtfully, but Ma Tante cut her off with a hand like a red soup plate.

"There's pinks and pinks. Wait till you see this one. Rue de la Paix, or I don't know me Paris. I don't think it's been on the lady's back twice. Wife of a very wealthy commercial gent."

Tina came back with a pink afternoon gown on a hanger. Mrs. Hogarth pursed her lips and viewed it dubiously. "It's not Parisian," she said. "The label says *Fezi-fit, London.*"

"Always do that," Ma Tante came back without the flicker of an eyelid. "Saves foreign duty coming through the Bombay customs."

"And it's got—er—stains under the arms."

"That's a special deodorant they put into the material for the tropical trade."

"And I think it would be a little large for me."

"Take it in—no extra charge. Go through and try it on, lovey."

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"How much are you asking for it?"

"To you twenty-eight rupees, and I'm just breaking even."

"I didn't want to go more than fifteen."

"So we call it twenty. I'm robbing meself, but them as helps the laborers in the vineyard of the Lord stores up treasures in heaven."

"I don't think it's quite—"

"So we let it go for seventeen fifty. I could get five American dollars without trying, if I took it up to the Seventh Day Mission. Come on, lovey, into it—so's I can see where it needs a tuck."

Ten minutes later and sixteen rupees richer, Ma Tante sat again at the center of her web and watched a battered sports car draw up at the gate. A young man got out and came up the path. She regarded him under lowered lids and approved of what she saw. He was tall, straight-backed, and very good-looking, with fair hair clipped short but still retaining an obstinate curl, and a moustache trimmed to the last degree of military elegance. He wore white riding breeches, immaculate boots, and a fine Kashmir polo shirt, and she could see a bunch of polo sticks in the special rack above the trunk compartment of the car. He stopped at the foot of the veranda steps and smiled up at her.

"Mrs. Pegler?" he asked.

"That's me name" she acknowledged. "But most people round here call me Ma Tante. French, you know, or was until I married Mr. Pegler and learned to talk English proper. Dead now, these ten years, God rest his soul."

"Eighth Royal Dragoons, wasn't he?"

Ma Tante heaved herself upright, the chair creaking ominously. "He was, indeed," she said with pride. "Regimental sergeant major. But how would you be knowing that? Bit before your time. He retired fifteen years before we buried him out there in the military cemetery."

"My father commanded the cavalry division in Risalpur in 1920. Major General Pentreath. I think he remembered the name of every officer and warrant officer under his command. He's dead now, too, I'm sorry to say."

"All the best ones is," Ma Tante said sadly. "Mechanization it was that done it. Seeing all them lovely horses being put down and getting stinking armored cars in their place. They didn't *want* to live. Killed the cavalry they have. Well, well, well. General Pentreath your dad, eh? Galloping George, we used to call 'im. No offense to him *or* you."

"None taken," he smiled.

"You're not in the Shiny Eights yourself, are you?" she asked.

He shook his head. "I'm not in the Army at all. I have to work for a living."

"Are you inferring the Army is a lot of bums?" she demanded indignantly.

"Not in the least—but it takes

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money to keep up a commission properly in a smart cavalry regiment, and I only have what I earn," he said.

She sighed. "Four polo ponies, two hunters—all them fancy uniforms to keep up—a civilian valet to be paid as well as the soldier orderlies. Murder it was for a boy without private means. So you've given it a miss, eh? What do you do for a living?"

"I'm a Press Secretary at Government House," he answered, and added, "The *junior* Press Secretary."

"That so?" she said, impressed. "Well, what can I do for you, Mr. Pentreath? You didn't come round here to take me picture for the social column."

"Money," he explained. "I understand you buy second-hand clothes?"

She bridled. "I deal in ladies' and gents' *used wardrobe*—and only the highest class goods at that."

"Oh, I didn't mean—" he began, but she cut him short.

"I run the only service of its kind in India—mail order. A lady or gent has no further need for a *good* article of clothing, I buy it, and I guarantee never to sell a garment on the station where it was bought—so nobody's likely to get embarrassed by running into a previous owner while wearing it, if you know what I mean."

"Splendid," he said. "I have a couple of suits I want to get rid of."

"Bring 'em round sometime," she told him.

"I've got them with me," he said, and went quickly back to the car. He pulled out an expensive pigskin suitcase and returned to her. Grunting and puffing, she bent and opened it. She pulled out the clothes, and her piggy eyes gleamed as she inspected them.

"Nice bit of Harris tweed, and a West of England saxony," she pronounced expertly. "Both Savile Row, and not worn much. Too heavy for India. Have to wait until a young gent about your fit is going Home on leave. Might be on me hands a long time. How much do you want for 'em?"

"One hundred rupees."

There was not a flicker of emotion in her face as she looked up at him. "What about the case?" she asked.

"I'm not selling it," he answered. "It belonged to my old man Look, those clothes are worth a hundred rupees easily. I paid over a hundred *pounds* for them not three months ago in London. Fourteen rupees to the pound—damn it all, work it out for yourself."

"Buying's one thing, selling's another, young man," she informed him. "So we call it seventy-five, eh?"

"We call it nothing of the sort," he said shortly. "It's a hundred or nothing."

"A hundred—with the case."

He shook his head and started to

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repack the clothes, punching them into the suitcase savagely.

"All right, eighty—without the case—and I'm robbing meself," she said.

He looked up at her. "Look, Ma Tante," he said quietly. "This is all a bit sordid, but I must have a hundred. I'm going up to Simla, and the fare's seventy-five. Admittedly my accommodations will cost me nothing, but I can't walk round a whole week-end jingling a bunch of keys in my pants pocket."

"I thought you Government House people got free travel warrants," she said.

"On authorized leave," he answered. "This is a quick dash up and down again under my own steam—and it's damned important. Somebody's birthday, as a matter of fact—and I've shot my month's pay on a present. You see what I mean?"

Ma Tante's heart was overlaid with several thicknesses of adipose tissue, but underneath it all it was still Gallic and susceptible. She sighed gustily and a smile softened her rugged features.

"I remember Mr. Pegler hocking his Long Service and Good Conduct Medal once, to buy me a liddle 'andbag for mine," she murmured, and a furtive tear trickled down her cheek and lost itself among the sweat droplets. "You win. A hundred it is—and 'ave a *luvverly* time, dearie."

"I will," said the young man fervently. "By Jove, it's good of you."

The telephone was ringing insistently on her bedside table. Ma Tante stirred, cursed sleepily, and emerged like an obese and raddled Aphrodite from the dingy foam of her mosquito net. She switched on the light and stared in amazement at the clock on the table. She took up the telephone and snarled, " 'Oo the blurry elsh calling, an' what the blurry 'ell for?" Then she remembered, retrieved and replaced her dentures.

"Ma Tante? Oh, thank the Lord! It's me—Pentreath—Those suits? Are they still with you?" The urgency in his voice brought her to ill-tempered wakefulness.

"Of course they're still with me," she snapped. "You only left 'em here this afternoon. What the hell's the idea of calling me at midnight to ask a damfool question like that?"

"Please, Ma Tante, please listen to me carefully. This is terribly important. There may be—there *should* be—a letter in the inside pocket of one or the other of the suits. Have you looked through them?"

"Couldn't it have waited till morning?" she demanded.

"It couldn't. I'm at the station, waiting to catch the Simla Mail—I've just missed it—the letter, I mean—Please—*please*—have a look, will you?" He was almost babbling.

"Wait a minute," she grunted and lurched across to the clothing racks. She jerked both suits from their hangers, carried them back to the

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bed, and went through the pockets.

"Yuh, there's one here," she said into the telephone. "Addressed to 'Lionel Pentreath, Esquire, Press Bureau, Ramabagh'—Government House crest an' a Simla postmark. That it?"

He almost sobbed his relief. "That's it—oh, God—Ma Tante, now listen. Get an envelope and put the whole thing in as it is, will you? Then seal it up and keep it with you. Don't let it out of your hands. I'll call and collect it from you when I get back on Monday. You understand?"

"Yes, yes, yes," Ma Tante said wearily. "But I wish some of you young shavers would—"

"Thank you, Ma Tante, thank you. You don't know what this means to me."

"I know what it means to *me*," she snarled. "I won't get to sleep again. *Good night*." And she banged the phone down.

There was a spring in his step and a sparkle in his eye when he came up the garden path on Monday afternoon, but his good spirits found no answering spark in Ma Tante's lugubrious demeanor. She lay back in her long chair, with a cold-water compress on her brow, and looked at him like a sorrowing codfish.

"Hello," he said, concerned. "Under the weather? We can't have this. Fever?"

"Siddown dearie," she begged. "And try not to think me too much of a silly, stupid, wicked old woman what ought to be under care and restraint—though Gawd knows I always done me best. You can ask anybody what knows Ma Tante. 'She always done her best,' they'll tell you and—"

"What on earth's the matter?" he asked, but she didn't appear to hear him. She quavered on pitifully.

"You trust people too much, Mr. Pegler was always saying. That's your trouble, Estelle. You *trust* people—then they bites the hand what feeds them."

"I wish you'd tell me—" he began.

"What am I doing? That letter—"

His legs suddenly seemed to be unequal to their job of holding him upright. He sat down heavily and stared at her in horror.

"What about the letter?" he whispered hoarsely.

"Never let it out of me sight, except once when I was having a bath. On me bedside table it was—and when I came back it was gone—just like that." She lowered her voice conspiratorially. "That Tina it was, if you ask me. Can't trust a one of 'em. Treated her like me own flesh and blood, I have, and now she's rounded on me."

"But—but what would she want with it?" he gasped.

"That's what I wondered—and I didn't have long to wait. When this Indian gentleman rang me on the telephone—"

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"What Indian gentleman? For God's sake woman, come to the point!" Pentreath's voice had a rising note of panic.

"I'm trying to tell you, dearie," she said reproachfully. "Rama Swami he called himself—but that's just 'John Smith' out here. Twenty-five thousand rupees he asked for—or he'd send it to Sir Benley Hesketh. He's your boss, isn't he?"

Pentreath fought for control. "I see," he said slowly. "Blackmail."

"Just the very word I used to him, dearie. Blackmail, I says to him. You ought to be ashamed of yourself to do that on a nice young man like Mr. Pentreath, I says. But I might have been talking to a brick wall. He just laughed."

Pentreath rose and strode through the French windows to the telephone.

"That's the stuff, dearie," Ma Tante called after him approvingly. "Cantonment 3924. Ask for the Assistant Commissioner himself—Major Price. Infantry before he transferred to the police, but a gentleman all the same. He'll do his best to keep it dark for you, but it's that Parsee magistrate's clerk you've got to watch. Sells stories like that to a dirty little newspaper in Calcutta, called *The Keyhole*."

Pentreath paused, then came back, his face hard and set.

"This, what do you call him? Rama Swami? Where can I find him?"

"I wish I knew, dearie," she answered hopelessly. "He was just a voice over the wire to me. *Nasty* voice."

"But he must have told you where to send the money?"

"No, he just told me to collect it, then he said he'd call me again and tell me where to send it. Gave you to next Tuesday, he did—that's a week from tomorrow. I wouldn't soil me hands, I told him, but then I got scared of what he might do to you and that sweet little Lady Moira Hesketch, so I said I'd pass the message on."

"Have you read the letter?" Pentreath asked, and she looked shocked and hurt.

"Me? I'm not the sort who'd do that. You can ask anybody. You can *trust* Ma Tante, they'll tell you. No, *I* didn't read it, dearie, but *he* did. Gave me some of the juicier bits over the telephone." She sniffed disapprovingly. "I must say I was just a bit disappointed in both of you—and her such a high-born lady. Of course she's so much younger than Sir Benley, isn't she? Although I imagine she could give *you* a few years."

"Shut up, damn you," he shouted.

"I'm trying to *help*," she said gently. "But there, you're upset, aren't you? Why don't you go and have a nice hot cup of tea and a cold shower—and think things over quietly? Decide what you're going to do. No good flying off at half cock, as Mr. Pegler used to say. Yes, you do that, dearie."

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"I'll be in touch," he said, and left quickly.

Ma Tante chuckled fatly, threw her cold compress into a corner, and yelled for her tea and "Tiger Water."

Lady Moira lay back in her bath and gazed through the open window across the Simla Hills, rising in serried steps to the distant snow-capped Himalayas. She screwed up her nose peevishly as a tap sounded on the door. "Who's that?" she asked, and added, "Go away."

"It's me, Lionel," Pentreath told her, and she trilled her delight, skipped out of the bath, unlocked the door, and hurried back into the warm, scented water.

"But how lovely!" She pointed with her toe to the bathroom stool. "Sit there and behave. How come you're back so soon? I'm coming down myself in two days."

"I sneaked up on the early train," he told her. "I'm supposed to be in Lonabagh covering a conference."

"Isn't that taking a hideous risk? Not that I'm not thrilled and flattered, but Benley-boogly-bear is going to be awfully crossie-wossie if he finds you playing hooky, isn't he? And you're not exactly a copper-bottomed fixture in that job, are you?"

"Moira," Pentreath said firmly. "This has got to end."

Moira's eyebrows rose in twin arcs. "Who's hog-tying you, precious?" she asked. "You're not a copper-bottomed fixture in my girlish heart, either. If you want to scratch yourself off the list, fine, but there's no need to come up here and do it in person. Must you always do everything the hammish way?"

"I don't mean *us*. Just the deceit, the underhandedness of it all."

"So what do *I* do? Ride a white horse through town, dressed as I am now, confessing all? Lionel darling, are you all right? I mean, you haven't been overworking down there in all that heat, have you?"

"Moira," he said. "We've got to face up to things. We've got to go to Benley and tell him. Ask him for your freedom, then we'll go back to London together."

"And live in open sin in an attic on nothing a year? Not me, darling. I'd rather be a Scarlet Woman in comfort. Chuck me a towel and let yourself out, there's a good boy."

"Something's happened," he said gloomily. "That letter you sent—"

"Which one?"

"The one you wrote after I'd gone down the time before last."

She giggled. "Oh, that? All purple passion and poetry. Think nothing to it, sweetest. Six martinis always bring out the Ella Wheeler Wilcox in me."

"I've *got* to think about it. An Indian in the bazaar has it, and he's trying to blackmail me. He's threatening to send it to Benley—"

She came out of the bath, arch-backed and horizontal, like a salmon leaping a cascade.

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"*What?*" she screamed. "You mean you *kept* it? And let somebody else get his hands on it? Oh, you bloody, *bloody* fool!"

"Moira darling," he said miserably. "I deserve that—yes, I kept it. It *meant* something to me—don't you understand?"

"But how did this damned Indian get it?"

"I left it in a suit I sold to Ma Tante—"

"*That* old bitch? It'll be all over the cantonments now."

"No, actually it was stolen from her. She's helping, trying to get it back."

"Listen," Moira said through clenched teeth. "You'll *get* it back, see? I don't care what he wants—*you'll get it back*—and you'll deliver it to me, so *I* can burn it. Understand?"

"What do you think I've been doing?" he demanded desperately. "I've been to every moneylender in the bazaar. No luck. They all say my job's not secure, that I'm a bad risk."

"And they can say it again," she said grimly. "Get back there, Pentreath, double-quick, and keep him talking. While you're still talking there's hope. I'll be down tomorrow now and I want action—"

"But Moira——"

Then they heard Moira being called from the garden.

"*Get down there,* you cretinous mollusk," Moira hissed, and pushed him out of the bathroom.

Pentreath called Ma Tante two days later. "I've got the money," he said through clenched teeth.

"Have you, dearie?" Ma Tante answered gently. "Just as well for all concerned, I suppose. Come round on Monday evening—eight o'clock—and we'll get the 'ole 'orrible business finished once and for all, and a great relief it'll be, I'm sure."

"I want it finished before then. Now—today," he snapped.

"Sorry, dearie," she said. "It'll take me that to get in touch with the Indian gentleman. You know what they're like. Don't like being 'urried." And she hung up, smiled, and then called another number.

Tina showed Pentreath into the dingily lighted wardrobe room, then disappeared like a dark ghost into the shadows. Ma Tante, sitting in her long chair like a boated spider in a creaking bamboo web just outside the circle of light cast by the shaded oil lamp, clucked sympathetically.

"You look real tuckered out, dearie," she said. "It must have been a worrying time for you."

"Have you got the letter?" he demanded.

"Have *you* got the money?" she countered.

"Of course I have." He pulled a flat pad of hundred-rupee bills from an inner pocket and placed it on the table between them. He held out his hand. "Give me the letter."

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"How much is there, dearie?" she asked. "Sorry to be fussy, but the Indian gentleman would be very angry if we was a bit light in the kitty."

"It's your whole pound of flesh, you old devil. Twenty-five thousand, as we agreed," he spat at her. "Give me that damned letter."

"What a way to talk," she said, aggrieved. "And me running meself ragged just to 'elp."

"You can drop the front now. Indian gentleman my eye. Give me the letter."

She laughed mockingly. "Listen to who's talking about fronts! A two-day-old letter left by accident in a heavy suit that you couldn't have worn since you left England—calling me up at midnight to make sure I found it. Waiting for the Simla Mail, *on a Friday*. The damned thing goes through an hour early on a Friday, you poor young twit—"

His jaw dropped, but only for an instant. "I don't know what the hell you're talking about," he said. "Anyhow, what does it matter? Give me that letter."

"I'd be *bound* to blackmail you," she went on. "Only natural. Didn't I do three years for the same thing in Bombay? Sure I did—and it's on my record down there in the European Domicileds' confidential file where you could see it. But that was a long time ago, m'sieur, before Mr. Pegler, God rest his generous decent soul, took a little French floozie out of a Grant Road joyhouse and made an honest woman out of her—and people can change."

The thick Marseillaise accent was predominating now, smothering the carefully acquired Cockney of the years in barracks. Something snapped inside Pentreath. Arm upraised he stepped toward her. "Give me the letter, or—" he began.

"Qui menace, a peur!" she taunted, and added, "Come out, Madame. You have no doubt heard enough."

Lady Moira came through the clothes racks into the light.

"And then some," she said succinctly. Pentreath was looking slowly from one to the other, his mouth opening and shutting soundlessly. Ma Tante tossed a letter onto the table.

"That and the money—both yours, I believe, Madame. Take them and settle your differences with this gentleman elsewhere, *s'il vous plait*."

"The main difference being twenty-five thousand rupees, Pentreath," Lady Moira said in a voice taut with contempt. "Fifty thousand you said she was asking, and fifty thousand I gave you."

"Moira, I can explain—" croaked Pentreath.

"Elsewhere, I said," Ma Tante repeated sharply. "The bazaar, the gutter, or wherever else rogues and harlots foregather these days. *I* would not be knowing. One loses touch."

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MORE "O" BITS

by RICHARD M. GORDON

V. The hungry Frenchman is unable
To suffer substitutes at table;
She offered cake instead of bread
So Antoinette has lost her head.

VI. After her fabulous bareback ride
(This fact is seldom told)
The beautiful Lady Godiva died,
Killed by a common cold.

VII. Cassius and Brutus, with greatest decorum,
Called for a quorum to meet in the forum,
And proud Julius Caesar succumbed to the gashes
Made by the quorum of Brutus and Cassius.

VIII. Whatever happened to Lady Jane,
The girl who was Queen for a Day?
She hadn't the brain to get out of the reign,
And the reign in the main, it is plain, got her slain.
Poor innocent Lady Jane Grey!

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the *NEWEST* police procedural by

LAWRENCE TREAT

Somebody had something against Inspector Mitch Taylor, and that somebody sure wasn't fooling. Why, it was worth Mitch's life just to make a routine call in line of duty, or just go out on patrol. He couldn't even leave his house in the morning without becoming a target. . . . Another in Lawrence Treat's prize-winning series about the way it really is for a member of the Homicide Squad—the threat of danger, all in the day's work . . .

T AS IN THREAT

by LAWRENCE TREAT

WHEN THE EPIDEMIC CAME along, Inspector Mitch Taylor got left out of it.

Maybe it wasn't a real epidemic in the strict, scientific sense, but it sure hit the Homicide Squad. Because, over and above some assorted colds, the Lieutenant came down with the mumps, and a few days later it turned out that Perkins had picked them up, too. Then Balenky got a touch of rheumatism and didn't show up for most of the week, and Bankhart had that emergency appendicitis operation and met a red-headed nurse that wanted to marry him and almost made it.

A little later Charlie Small got an allergy nobody could trace down, except it had something to do with his wife, and he got sick leave out of it. After that Jub Freeman, up in the lab, passed out from what the doctors said was overwork and nervous exhaustion, same as Willie Mays.

Mitch, of course, had nothing, and he got to brooding about all the sick leave he'd missed out on from being too healthy over the years, and the idea hurt.

The trouble was he'd been brought up all wrong. He and Bobby Conley, who'd lived next door, they both had it drummed into them that only sissies got sick or ever had anything the matter with them. Thinking about it now made Mitch feel kind of old-fashioned, because medical research had found out all these things you *could* have, and Mitch couldn't take advantage of any of them. It was too late.

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Mitch and Bobby Conley had been just a couple of kids and not too smart at that, and all they knew at the time was that everybody else got around to staying home from school every once in a while, only not them. The others caught colds or had measles or stomachaches or stuff like that, but Mitch and Bobby couldn't even manage a minor accident. They never slipped on the ice, and strange dogs never took a nip at them, and when the two of them climbed back fences they ripped their pants all right, but themselves, they didn't even get scratched.

The only way they had of getting out of school was, they played hookey once in a while. Ahead of time, they always figured out some complicated scheme for being a spy or robbing a bank or hijacking an armored truck. They spent hours cooking up those plans and figuring them out in detail, and some of their ideas were real honeys. Then the next day, being escaped spies or wanted criminals, they couldn't go to school, could they? So they went off somewheres.

But all that was long ago and had happened back in New York. And now Mitch was a cop out here and he'd heard Bobby had gotten into trouble and served time, which was no skin off Mitch's back. He hadn't seen the guy in years and wouldn't even know him if he ran into him.

But the point was, there was this epidemic, and it was a real break that it happened during one of those dull periods when nothing much came into the Homicide Squad except a few barroom assaults and some robberies you just looked up in the M.O. files. Stuff like that was the usual work here, anyhow, because while they called it the Homicide Squad, there weren't enough actual homicides to keep the eight men of the squad busy. So Homicide handled all crimes of violence or threatened violence.

Like this gas-station robbery last week, for instance. Nobody'd got killed or even shot at, and the chances were that whoever had done it, he'd do it a few more times the same way, and after a while he'd get caught and then he'd admit all the other holdups. But right now Mitch had this tip—somebody on Wharton Street knew all about who pulled the job, he could identify and give proof, too, and Mitch could maybe wrap up the whole case. Just go there and ask.

Normally in a neighborhood like Wharton, Mitch wouldn't go there alone, but with half the squad practically on their deathbeds, he had to take a chance. But he had sense enough not to park on Wharton; if he left a car unattended there he'd come out and find a couple of flats and some broken glass where the windshield used to be, and maybe a few words chalked onto the car to show what somebody thought about cops.

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That was why Mitch parked back on Clement and walked over to Wharton. The address he'd been told to go to was 207 and he was supposed to ask for somebody named Chick, second-floor rear. The houses here were mostly brick and there was a solid row of them, three stories high and all of them ugly. There was no 207, but 203 and 211 were next to each other, so Mitch tried both of them.

He rang all the second-floor-rear bells, and nobody knew about anybody called Chick, and if they had, they wouldn't have told. So the whole thing was either a mistake or else somebody wanted him to show up around here, which didn't make Mitch feel particularly comfortable. Or particularly bright, either.

When he finished up with 211, he came out and stood on the stoop a few seconds and took a gander around him. Here he was, a kind of chesty guy, not too tall, nothing much to look at, and with a jacket that was a little tight on him. Cop was written all over him—and not wanting to be here. It was plain as the nose on his face.

But nobody seemed to notice him. Nobody was loitering in any dark doorways, nobody took a dirty look at him, there were no teen-agers hanging around the corner bar-and-grill or the candy store. There was just a ten-year-old towhead across the street fiddling with a piece of wire that looked like it had a hook on the end. He was studying it out and standing alongside a blue sedan. He was maybe practicing on how to break into locked cars, and if he became good enough, Mitch might run into him in another five or six years.

Mitch went down the stoop and turned left, and that was when somebody dropped the brick on him.

It missed, of course. It landed maybe four feet away, and what you do is, you don't want to start anything around here, so you look kind of surprised and pretend it's an accident, and then you beat it. Only this towhead across the street spoiled the act by yelling to Mitch.

"He did it—him, up there on the roof—he threw it!"

"Who?" Mitch called out, and he looked up and got a glimpse of a plaid cap. He couldn't see the guy's face under it, but there was no doubt about the cap. And after that, what was Mitch supposed to do? Here was a deliberate attempt to kill a cop, or bean him anyhow, and you just couldn't let something like that go by. Particularly when windows were beginning to open up and people were sticking their heads out to find out what all the trouble was about.

So Mitch bent down and picked up the brick and examined it. Then he swung around, went into the house that the thing had dropped off from the roof of, and he climbed up.

The guy wasn't waiting there, of

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course, but he'd dropped his plaid cap getting away and Mitch picked it up. You don't see many plaid caps like that around, and Mitch looked at the label inside. It said, *Hap the Hatter, New York, Boston.* 8½. And what could you make out of that?

Mitch walked to the edge of the roof to see if maybe a brick had accidentally fallen off, so that somebody with a plaid cap might have looked down to find out if it had hit anybody. Only Mitch couldn't find a place where there was a brick missing, and the hunk he had in his hand was a different color from any up here, and that settled it.

He went through the building and knocked on doors and asked his questions, and got nowheres. Then he took his brick and his plaid cap from Hap the Hatter and went back to Clement, unlocked his car, and reported in to the dispatcher. They didn't need him for anything, so he said he'd completed his investigation and was returning to headquarters.

He made the four miles in a little over half an hour, on account it was four o'clock when he started back and there was no sense getting back before half-past. Any earlier, it could hurt you; you could run into an assignment that could keep you busy till six, seven o'clock. But four thirty, you were pretty safe. You checked in, and then you went to the Men's Room for a while, and then you remembered you had to stop off in the Records Room for something or other, and then you sat down in the Squad Room and did a little paper work, and by that time it was five and you could go home.

He stuck the brick and the plaid cap in his desk. If Balenky had been around, Mitch maybe would have talked the thing over with him, but Balenky still had his rheumatism. And while Jub was back again in the lab, there was no point bothering him, he had his own troubles. So the best place for the brick and the plaid cap was in the desk, where they could sit for a few months or until Mitch happened to find them. Because that lower right drawer, he opened it maybe once or twice a year. And then closed it up. Why make work?

The next day Lieutenant Decker was at his desk again, and everybody from all over the place dropped in and asked him how he was, and he said lousy. So, even if Mitch had figured on showing him the brick and the plaid cap, it would have been the wrong time.

It turned out to be another of those days without much to do, and Mitch spent most of it patrolling. He had his regular car, Number Four, and he stopped in at a few places and saw a few people, some of his contacts and stoolies and so on. So if anybody had wanted to see Mitch, they could easily have guessed where to find him. Which a guy in a plaid cap did.

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Whether it was the same guy or somebody else, he made sure Mitch didn't see enough of him to tell. And the guy didn't exactly talk to Mitch or even wait around much. What he did was, he took a pot shot at Mitch with a zip gun, and missed.

Mitch heard the *zing*, and the shot went by him and hit the side of the car and made a dent in it. Mitch spotted the plaid cap, and that was about all. Somebody wearing it had fired from around the corner of a building and then beat it, so Mitch hotfooted it after him. The guy went flying down an alley —he could maybe run ten yards to Mitch's eight—so Mitch slowed up, took out his gun and aimed it up at the sky, but didn't fire.

When you fire a shot, you got to account for it. You got to make out a whole AA sheet, and besides that, every once in a while the slug comes down in the wrong place and then there's a full dress investigation, and who wants that? Besides, the guy was gone, so Mitch put his gun back in his holster and wondered what the hell Hap the Hatter had against him and what he'd try next.

He didn't try again until the following day. By that time things were getting back to normal on the Homicide Squad. Balenky didn't show any signs of rheumatism, Charlie Small looked like he'd gotten over his allergy and was back with his wife, and the Lieutenant was snapping at everybody that couldn't at least report a homicide.

Mitch fixed that up for him, or at least gave him a pretty good substitute, and the way it happened was, Mitch started out for work that morning, same as usual. He came downstairs in the elevator and went through the L-shaped corridor that led out to the garden around which the apartment house was built. Then he walked through the archway and out to the street, turned right, and walked three blocks to the bus line on Lincoln.

He stopped at the corner newsstand like he always did and he said hello to the guy that ran it. Mitch didn't buy a paper. He never did. Like he'd explained to the guy, on the dough the city paid you, you didn't *buy* any newspapers. And the guy understood, and every once in a while when there was a wrong count or something and there was a paper left over, it was for Mitch. Only not this morning.

He had the boulevard to cross and he waited for the light. The car parked there at the corner, the first one along the curb—Mitch didn't particularly look at it, he didn't even notice that the engine was running. But as Mitch started out, from the corner of his eye he saw the car start, and he jumped back and almost fell. The car tried to turn at him, but there wasn't room and it went scooting ahead, with the gears screaming and the motor roaring.

Everybody started yelling. Mitch squinted, but the license plates were smeared with mud and he couldn't

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make out the numbers. All he knew was, it was a '66 black Ford sedan and its driver had tried to run him over.

The rest fell into place like he'd guessed it would, except for one thing. The part he'd guessed was, it was a stolen car, they found it on a side street about four blocks away, and nobody had a description of the guy that drove it. The thing Mitch hadn't guessed was, they found a plaid cap on the front seat, and the label in it said *Hap the Hatter, New York, Boston*. And it was size 8½.

Mitch told the Lieutenant all about it, and about the other attempts. Lieutenant Decker's gray eyes got a little bit rounder, which made him look more like an owl than usual.

"Brother!" he said. Mitch couldn't tell whether the Lieutenant was glad there was something to sink his teeth into, or worried because somebody was trying to get Mitch. After a while the Lieutenant said, "Let's see the cap."

Mitch brought it in, and Decker fingered it. "Eight and a half," he said. "Somebody's got a swelled head."

"Come to think of it," Mitch said, "I don't think it fitted him too good. It sort of hung down over his ears, and you couldn't see his face."

"Let Jub look it over," the Lieutenant said, which meant that Jub would examine it under a microscope, find a few hairs and some dirt and some other stuff, and tell what color the guy's hair was and maybe how old he was or how much he weighed and what kind of hair tonic he used. Only Jub didn't pull his usual miracle. He just said it looked like a new cap and you couldn't tell much from it.

By afternoon the Homicide Squad and every precinct was alerted to look for a guy with a plaid cap and bring him in. Besides that, the Lieutenant had called the New York and Boston police and put the problem to them, and about all he got for his trouble was a phone bill.

As for Mitch, he began to get worried and he wondered what was coming next. Which he didn't have to do, because the Lieutenant came up with a real bright idea. He took Mitch into the little cubicle that the Lieutenant called an office, and he put it to Mitch.

"The way I see it," Decker said, "you don't kill a man by dropping a brick on his head—chances are against making it. And you certainly don't kill him with a zip gun."

"What about that car trying to run me over?" Mitch said, feeling a little let down.

"Chances are still against killing," Decker said, "but they're certainly trying to scare you."

"They done it," Mitch said. "I'm scared and I don't know what's coming next. I'm plenty scared."

"But they don't know that," the

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Lieutenant said, "so maybe that's not what they want. Maybe they want you to have an accident, and if so, we can give them one."

"Meaning what?" Mitch asked suspiciously.

"We'll manage something. A broken leg, or maybe just a sprained ankle will do it. If we could have an accident in the building, say down in the basement on the pistol range—" Decker grinned happily. "Brother!" he said. "That's it—we'll shoot you!"

"Boss, ain't that carrying things a little too far?"

Decker burst out laughing. "Hell, not for real. We'll just give a story out that you were shot accidentally. We'll carry you out on a stretcher and bring you to the hospital. I'll give the item to the papers, and then we'll see what happens."

Mitch thought it over. "If I'm in the hospital like that, on orders, that makes it twenty-four-hour duty," he said. "Under the regulations pertaining to unusual duty for more than a twelve-hour period, I'd get extra pay."

"You'll be on twenty-four-hour call," the Lieutenant said. "Rule forty-seven B, subsection nine. Regular pay. You could also handle it under sick leave."

"Yeah," Mitch said quietly. "Well, I better call Amy and tell her about the hospital bit. I wouldn't want her to worry."

That was how Mitch came to be brought to Mercy Hospital and put in his own private room. His chart said something about a bullet wound, and to keep the hospital staff from asking questions, the police surgeon came around a couple of times and pretended he was making an examination. But all the tests and things that a hospital is supposed to make, they just didn't bother about them with Mitch. And the only intern he even saw was some character who came into the room by mistake, and apologized.

Still, all in all it wasn't too bad. Amy came in the morning, and evenings some of the squad dropped in and they talked shop. Mitch was a little bored, maybe, but this was a pretty easy way to earn a living, so he didn't complain. And then there was this kid.

He was around nineteen or twenty. He didn't talk much, except to say his name was Jerry. It turned out he was a kind of police buff and he'd read that a cop had been shot and was in the hospital, and he came around to see if he could keep Mitch company.

That frizzly-haired nurse with the Polish monicker brought him in. She said there was someone outside called Jerry, and Mitch didn't know him but he wanted to visit, and was it okay? Mitch kind of kidded around and asked if the guy looked dangerous, and then he said if she'd protect him it would be all right, so bring him in. And then this Jerry walked in.

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He was kind of embarrassed at first and didn't say much. He said he'd read to Mitch or maybe play checkers; he was quite a checker player, so Mitch settled for that, and the kid beat him about six times running, and then left.

He was back the next day, still kind of shy and still not talking much. He asked Mitch about his wound and Mitch made up some stuff. He had to act like he was all bandaged up underneath the covers and didn't feel so good, which was a pretty thin alibi for getting licked regular at checkers.

Mitch told the squad about him, and it turned out none of them played checkers, so if they'd brought a board into Homicide, Mitch would have been the champ easy. Anyhow, Jerry helped pass the time, but even so, Mitch was getting tired of lying around and doing nothing. And on the fourth day, it was Mamie's birthday, she was going to be eight, and what kind of an old man would she think he was if he didn't show up? Besides, she'd get quite a kick out of it if he showed up unexpected. So around three p.m. he got out of bed, put his clothes on, and stepped out.

The frizzly-haired floor nurse damn near had a fit, so Mitch pointed out she couldn't hold him, she had no right to, it would be false imprisonment, and he was a cop and knew all about it. Besides, he felt fine, so where did she come off to keep him here? She said okay, he could go if he signed a paper saying the hospital wouldn't be responsible for anything that happened, which Mitch refused to sign. Because if you sign something like that and then put in for sick leave, you're wide-open to somebody up in the accounting department holding up your pay, and who's going to risk that?

Anyhow, Mitch knew they couldn't hold him, so he went on out. He was just going down the front steps of the hospital when he heard a siren and then this ambulance came tearing up to the emergency entrance. On account there were two cops riding the ambulance, which meant something serious had happened, Mitch walked over, and when they pulled the stretcher out, he was able to see pretty good.

He didn't see the guy's face. All Mitch saw was the red robe, like a monk's, and the red cowl, and that did it. He sort of stopped short and his breath caught in his throat, and he came as close to shivering as a guy like him is ever going to. Then he walked over to one of the cops, and Mitch's voice squeaked when he spoke.

"Bank holdup?" he said.

The cop swung around. "How did you know? And who are you, anyhow?"

Mitch took out his identification card. "Taylor, Homicide," he said. "Just a guess. What happened?"

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"I don't know much," the cop said. "It wasn't even on my beat. They just called me in to ride the ambulance, and all I know is, some punks held up a bank and this guy is one of them. A monk, too—would you believe it?"

"What kind of a monk?" Mitch said.

"A dead one. Or damn near it. And he or one of his pals shot up the bank guard, and he *is* dead."

Mitch didn't say anything after that. He just turned around and went back to the hospital and took the elevator up to his floor. Frizzly-hair looked at him like he was nuts.

"I got lonesome for you," Mitch said. "That's why I came back."

"You'd better get into bed and stay there," she said. "And your friend's waiting for you. I didn't tell him where you went, I just said he could wait."

Mitch didn't move. "Can you lock the door of my room?"

"Of course not. Why?"

"Never mind why," Mitch said. "Will you phone down to emergency? A couple of cops just brought in a stretcher case. Ask for one of them to come up here right away. Tell them it's important."

She started to object, except Mitch gave her a look meaning she'd better do what he told her to because otherwise, nurse or no nurse, he'd have to put the boot to her. Then, as she reached for the phone, the door of Mitch's room opened up and Jerry came out.

He didn't say anything. He saw Mitch all dressed up and saw the nurse next to him with her hand almost on the phone, and anybody could have told that things weren't exactly on the up and up. Still, Mitch tried to pass it off.

"Hi, Jerry," he said. "They let me out for a little exercise. Been waiting long?"

Jerry didn't answer. He kept on walking forward, and his hand dipped into his pocket. Mitch, aware that the nurse had backed off, went into a line of chatter.

"They got a place upstairs," he said. "The solarium. A guy up there, he thought he could play checkers, but I took him over, and whaddaya know about that?"

Jerry just kept on coming, and Mitch would have run all right if there'd been a place to run to. But the thing was, once Mitch tried to beat it or let on he knew what was coming, this Jerry would gun him down. Which he was going to do anyhow, so Mitch made like he didn't know it.

"Me, the checker champ!" he said, grinning, and then he figured he was close enough and made a flying tackle. He hit this Jerry somewheres in the middle, where it hurt, and then Mitch was trying to grab the gun and the pair of them were rolling over, until suddenly Jerry seemed to get yanked right out from under Mitch and Jerry's grip on the gun went limp.

Mitch looked up, and here was

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this nurse holding onto Jerry's leg that she's practically pulled out of its socket or something, and with Jerry practically passed out.

Mitch, holding the gun, crawled away. He didn't say anything, but the nurse did. "The idea," she said, "of attacking a sick man! And on my floor, too!"

"Just get that cop from downstairs like I asked you to," Mitch said.

She opened her mouth to say yes or something, but the reaction set in and she started stuttering and getting the shakes.

"W-w-what's th-th—"

Mitch pointed the gun at her and made like he was going to shoot. "Better do what I tell you to," he said. "Otherwise—" He tapped the gun, and grinned. "It's got a silencer on it, too. Nobody would even hear the shot."

She got hold of herself then, and she turned around and went for the phone. And while he was waiting for the cop to come upstairs with some handcuffs, Mitch stared down at Jerry. The guy groaned, and managed to sit up.

"Those plaid caps," Mitch said, "they were just decoys, weren't they? Make us wonder about them, when they had nothing to do with what you guys were after, which was to put me in the hospital where you figured you could knock me off easy. A private hospital room, it's a real good place to commit a murder, isn't it?"

Jerry groaned again. "You're not wounded," he said. "You were faking."

"That's right," Mitch said. "You figured you'd wait until the last minute, after the holdup and when you were lamming out, and then you'd walk in here. You'd have no trouble getting in—they knew you—nobody'd be suspicious, and you'd shoot me. And with that silencer, nobody'd hear the shot. Afterwards you'd put a 'Do Not Disturb' sign on the door and just walk out. No hurry. Nobody knows who you really are, and nobody's going to connect you with that holdup."

"You're crazy," Jerry said.

He was still saying it when the cop came in and put the bracelets on him. Mitch told the patrolman to get help and bring Jerry down to headquarters, where he'd be charged with armed robbery and murder. Then Mitch went down the corridor to the nurse's desk.

"You just about saved my life, sister. Feeling better now?"

"A little. But all that excitement—it was almost too much for me. Who is he? And why did he want to kill you?"

"Just let me use the phone and you'll hear most of it."

Mitch called the dispatcher and asked to be put through to Lieutenant Decker, wherever he was. A couple of minutes later the Lieutenant's voice sounded crisply.

"Decker, Homicide."

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"Chief, this is Taylor, and I'm still up at the hospital. About that bank job—how many of them were there?"

"Three. One of them's in the hospital, and we're looking for the other two."

"I got one of them here," Mitch said, "and the third guy, he's the head of the gang and he's from New York. They ought to be able to pick him up easy. Name of Robert Conley."

"Who told you?" Decker wanted to know.

"Those red monk robes did," Mitch said. "When we were kids, me and Conley cooked up the whole scheme. The monk robes were a kind of red herring—nobody would notice anything else or talk about anything else. Monks in red, pulling a holdup—we thought it was a great idea, but when Conley carried it out, he had to get me out of the picture, and he sure tried. He tried real hard."

Mitch put the phone down and noticed the blood on his knuckles. It wasn't exactly a serious wound, but here he was in a hospital and this was his big chance to get a wound treated right and get himself on the hospital records.

He showed his hand to the nurse. "Do you suppose," he said hopefully, "you can do something about this?"

She gave it a glance, and smiled sympathetically. "Of course," she said. "If you'll wait here a sec, I'll go get a Band-Aid."

INDEX TO VOLUME FIFTY-TWO—JULY-DECEMBER 1968

(*Continued from page 161*)

TREAT, LAWRENCE: Change of Heart ..... Aug. 151
T As in Threat ..... Dec. 150
TWOHY, R.: McKevitt—100 Proof Oct. 118
TYRE, NEDRA: The Disappearance of Mrs. Standwick ..... July 56
VAN DOREN, MARK: This Terrible Thing ..... July
WYLIE, PHILIP: Invitation to Murder ..... Nov.
YOUNG, ALAN K.: Reflection on Murder ..... Oct.

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AARONS, APRIL: The Bargain Hunter ..... Sept. 38
ANONYMOUS: Riddle: A Real Brain Teaser ..... Aug. 107
BANKIER, WILLIAM: Time Bomb Aug. 99
BLOCH, ROBERT: The Gods Are Not Mocked ..... Aug. 146
BRAND, CHRISTIANNA: The Skipping Game ..... July 140
The Gemminy Crickets Case .. Aug. 6
BRITTAIN, WILLIAM: Man Who Read Sir Arthur Conan Doyle ..... Aug. 59
Mr. Strang Takes a Field Trip Dec. 79
BURKE, JOHN: Miss Mouse and Mrs. Mouse ..... Nov. 135
BUTLER, GWENDOLINE: The Sisterhood ..... Oct. 6
CARR, JOHN DICKSON: Adventure of the Conk-Singleton Papers Oct. 67
CHRISTIE, AGATHA: The Crackler July 43
The COMPANION ..... Dec. 116
CORNIER, VINCENT: The Precedent Aug. 87
COXE, GEORGE HARMON: The Appearance of Truth ..... Dec. 18
CROSS, JAMES: A Matter of Probabilities ..... Nov. 148
CULLINGFORD, GUY: Locals Should Know Best ..... Oct. 39
CURTIS, RICHARD: Odds Bodkins and the Featherstone Affair Sept. 118
DEFORD, MIRIAM ALLEN: The Ptarmigan Knife ..... Sept. 24
FEDO, MICHAEL: My Brother's Keeper ..... July 127
FREMLIN, CELIA: The Betrayal .. Sept. 143
Something Evil in the House Dec. 89
GARDNER, ELSIN ANN: Wide O- Sept. 116
GILBERT, ANTHONY: Who Cares About an Old Woman? .... Oct. 150
GILBERT, MICHAEL: Eyes That Miss Nothing ..... Sept. 6
GILFORD, C. B.: The Grisly Game Aug. 76
GORDON, RICHARD M.: More "O" Bits ..... Dec. 149
GORES, JOE: File #3: The Pedretti Case ..... July 149
File #4: Lincoln Sedan Deadline ..... Sept. 149
HARRISON, MICHAEL: Assassination of Sir Ponsonby Browne .... Sept. 99
HAY, JACOB: The Man From H-to-M ..... Oct. 138
HOCH, EDWARD D.: The Spy Who Read Latin ..... Aug. 28
The Theft of the Brazen Letters Nov. 67
HOYT, W. R.: Inspector Squid's Most Famous Case ..... July 133
JAMES, P. D.: Moment of Power .. July
JOHNSON, JEROME L.: Start From Scratch ..... Dec.
KERSH, GERALD: The Pettifer Collection ..... Nov. 1
LACY, ED: More Than One Way To Skin a Cat ..... July 1
LAMPREY, A. C.: Gumshoe Glossary: Number Three ..... July
LOW, LOUIS GREGORY: To the Last Detail ..... Sept. 1
LUTZ, JOHN: The Insomniacs Club Sept.
MATHER, BERKELY: Ma Tante Always Done Her Best ..... Dec. 1
MCCLOY, HELEN: Of Time and Murder ..... July
MCNEAR, ROBERT: Philo's Gestation ..... Nov.
PACHTER, JOSH: E. Q. Griffen Earns His Name ..... Dec. 1
PALMER, STUART: The Stripteaser and the Private Eye ..... Nov.
PELLE, ALEX: Play It Cool, Pal .. Aug. 6
PENTECOST, HUGH: Murder Underground ..... Oct. 1
Pierre Chambrun and the Black Days ..... Dec.
PERRY, PAUL: Fixed Fee ..... Oct. 8
PETRIE, RHONA: What We're All Hooked On ..... Sept. 4
Such a Long Time After ..... Dec. 6
PIERCE, JOHN: The Chicken Game July 8
A Case of Jurisdiction ..... Aug. 10
Something Damp and Green .. Oct. 13
A Child's Garden of Profits ... Dec. 5
POWELL, JAMES: Maze in the Elevator ..... July 6
The Daring Daylight Melon Robbery ..... Oct. 8
The Great Paleontological Murder Mystery ..... Nov. 12
QUEEN, ELLERY: Queen's Quorum: Supplement Number One .. Nov. 11
Queen's Quorum: Supplement Number Two ..... Dec. 13
REED, KIT: The Perfect Portrait .. July 5
ROOS, KELLEY: The "Watch Out!" Girls ..... Aug. 10
SIMENON, GEORGES: Inspector Maigret's War of Nerves ..... Oct. 7
SLESAR, HENRY: Don't I Know You? ..... Sept. 14
SMETHURST, BEN: All You Need Is Guts ..... Oct. 6
STOUT, REX: The Rodeo Murder . Sept. 6
SYMONS, JULIAN: A Theme for Hyacinth ..... Aug. 4
The Hidden Clue ..... Nov. 9

(Continued on page 160)

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